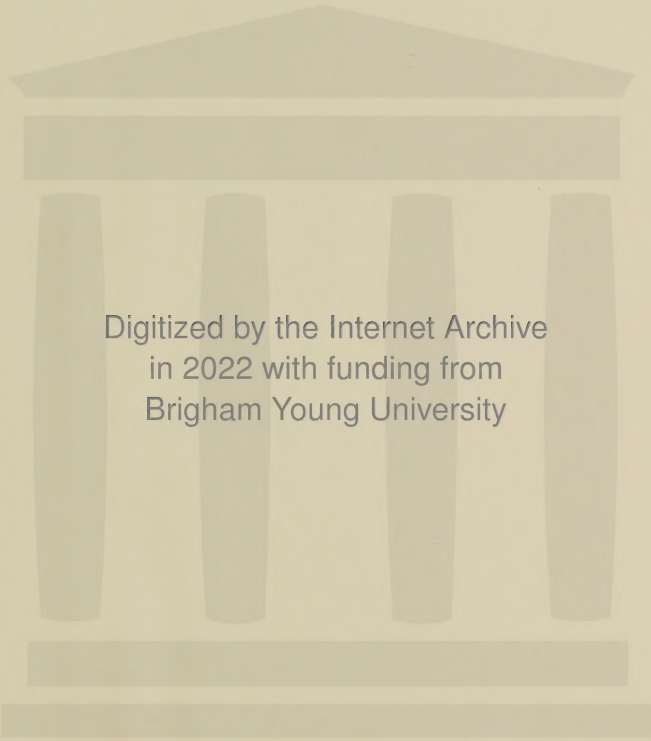


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The Importance of Being Earnest

A TRIVIAL COMEDY FOR SERIOUS
PEOPLE

BY
OSCAR WILDE

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The Importance of
Being Earnest

A TRIVIAL COMEDY FOR THIRTEEN ACTS

BY OSCAR WILDE

IN THREE ACTS

Transcribed by [illegible]

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*Played for the first time at the St. James's Theatre,
on Thursday, February 14th, 1895*

CHARACTERS

JOHN WORTHING, J.P., of the Manor House,
Woolton, Hertfordshire

—Mr. George Alexander

ALGERNON MONCRIEFF, his friend

—Mr. Allan Aynesworth

REV. CANON CHASUBLE, D.D., Rector of Wool-
ton Mr. H. H. Vincent

MERRIMAN, butler to Mr. Worthing

—Mr. Frank Dyll

LANE, Mr. Moncrieff's man-servant

—Mr. F. Kinsey Peile

LADY BRACKNELL Miss Rose Leclercq

HON. GWENDOLINE FAIRFAX, her daughter

—Miss Irene Vanbrugh

CECILY CARDEW, John Worthing's ward

—Miss Evelyn Millard

MISS PRISM Mrs. George Canninge

ACT I. *Algernon Moncrieff's Rooms in Half Moon
Street, W.*

ACT II. *The Garden at the Manor House, Woolton.*

ACT III. *Morning-room at the Manor House, Wool-
ton.*



The Importance of Being Earnest

ACT ONE

SCENE: ALGY'S rooms in Half Moon Street. Door up R.C. and door L.; fireplace C. The room is luxuriously furnished and artistically. Cigarettes, bread and butter, cucumber sandwiches on writing-table up L.

Piano heard off L. The curtain then rises.
LANE is arranging afternoon tea on table C., and after piano has ceased ALGY enters L.

ALGY. (L.C.) Did you hear what I was playing, Lane?

LANE. (*Coming down C.*) I didn't think it polite to listen, sir. (L.C.)

ALGY. I'm sorry for that. Have you got the cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell?

LANE. (*Goes up for sandwiches and brings them down*) Yes, sir. (*Hands them.*)

ALGY. (L.C., *takes one or two off plate and goes R., and sits on sofa*) Oh, by the way, Lane, I see from your book that on Thursday night, when Lord Shoreham and Mr. Worthing were dining with me, eight bottles of champagne are entered as having been consumed.

LANE. (R.C., *up stage, arranging tea-table*) Yes, sir; eight bottles and a pint.

ALGY. Why is it that at a bachelor's establishment

the servants invariably drink the champagne? I ask merely for information.

LANE. I attribute it to the superior quality of the wine, sir. I have often observed that in *married* households, the champagne is *rarely* of a first-rate brand.

ALGY. Good Heavens! Is marriage so demoralizing as that?

LANE. (*Gravely*) I believe it *is* a very pleasant state, sir. (*Goes up for bread and butter*) I have had very little experience of it myself, up to the present. I have only been married *once*. That was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and the young person. (*Moves R.C.*)

ALGY. (*Crosses L.C. to table*) I don't know that I am much interested in your family life, Lane.

LANE. (L.) No, sir—(*Takes something from down L. and moves up C. to R.*)—it is not a very interesting subject. I never think of it myself.

ALGY. Very natural, I am sure. That will do, Lane, thank you.

LANE. Thank you, sir. (*Exit up R.*)

ALGY. (C.) Lane's views on marriage seem somewhat lax. Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them? They seem, as a class, to have absolutely no sense of their moral responsibility.

LANE. (*Enters R. Announcing*) Mr. Ernest Worthing. (*Enter JACK R. Exit LANE R.*)

ALGY. (C. of table) How do you do, my dear Ernest? What brings *you* up to town? (*Eating sandwiches.*)

JACK. (R.C.) Oh, pleasure, pleasure! What else should bring one anywhere? (*Putting hat on table*) Eating as usual, I see, Algy!

ALGY. (L.C., *stiffly*) I believe it *is* customary in good society to take some slight refreshment at five

o'clock. Where have you been since last Thursday?
(*Goes away to L. of table.*)

JACK. Oh, in the country.

ALGY. What on earth do you *do* there?

JACK. (*Pulling off his gloves*) When one is in town one amuses *oneself*. When one is in the country one amuses *other* people; it is excessively boring.

ALGY. (R.C.) And who are the people you amuse?

JACK. (*Airily*) Oh, neighbors, neighbors!

ALGY. Got nice neighbors in your part of Shropshire?

JACK. Perfectly horrid! Never speak to any of them.

ALGY. (*Crosses to back of table*) How immensely you must amuse them. (*Goes over and takes sandwich*) By the way, Shropshire *is* your county?

JACK. Eh? Shropshire? Yes, of course. (*Rising and crossing c.*) Hallo! Why all these cups? Why cucumber sandwiches? Who is coming to tea?

ALGY. Oh, merely Aunt Augusta and Gwendoline.

JACK. How perfectly delightful!

ALGY. Yes, that is all very well, but I am afraid Aunt Augusta won't quite approve of your being here.

JACK. (C., *putting down gloves*) May I ask why?

ALGY. My dear fellow, the way you flirt with Gwendoline is perfectly disgraceful. It is almost as bad as the way Gwendoline flirts with you.

JACK. I am in love with Gwendoline. I have come up to town expressly to propose to her.

ALGY. I thought you had come up for pleasure? I call that business. (*Sitting L. of table.*)

JACK. How utterly unromantic you are! (*Sitting R.C. table.*)

ALGY. I really don't see anything romantic in proposing. It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal. Why,

8 THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST ACT I

one may be accepted. One usually is, I believe. Then the excitement is all over. The very essence of romance is uncertainty. (JACK makes as if to take a sandwich. ALGY takes up plate and puts it on his knee) Please don't touch the cucumber sandwiches. They are ordered specially for Aunt Augusta. (*Takes one and eats it.*)

JACK. Well, you have been eating them all the time.

ALGY. That is quite a different matter. She is my aunt. (*Rises; takes plate from below*) Have some bread and butter. The bread and butter is for Gwendoline. Gwendoline is devoted to bread and butter.

JACK. (*Rises and takes bread and butter away*) And very good bread and butter it is, too.

ALGY. Well, my dear fellow, you need not eat it as if you were going to eat it all. You behave as if you were married to her already. You are not married to her already, and I don't think you ever will be.

JACK. Why on earth do you say that?

ALGY. Well, in the first place, girls never marry the men they flirt with. Girls don't think it right.

JACK. Oh, that is nonsense.

ALGY. It isn't. It is a great truth. It accounts for the extraordinary number of bachelors that one sees all over town. In the second place, I don't give my consent.

JACK. Your consent!

ALGY. My dear fellow, Gwendoline is my first cousin; and before I allow you to marry her, you will have to clear up the whole question of Cecily. (*Crosses in front to door R.; rings bell.*)

JACK. Cecily! (*Moving*) What on earth do you mean? What do you mean, Algy, by Cecily? I don't know anyone of the name of Cecily.

(*Enter LANE R. flat door.*)

ALGY. (*Walks down R.*) Lane, bring me that cigar case Mr. Worthing left in the smoking-room the last time he dined here.

LANE. Yes, sir. (*Exit R. ALGY returns C.*)

JACK. (C.) Do you mean to say you have had my cigar case all this time? I wish to goodness you had let me know. I have been writing frantic letters to Scotland Yard about it. I was nearly offering a large reward.

ALGY. (*Crossing R.*) Well, I wish you *would* offer one. I happen to be more than usually hard-up.

(*Enter LANE.*)

JACK. There is no good offering a large reward now that the thing is found. (*LANE comes down C. with cigar case on salver. JACK is about to take it. ALGY takes it and moves down R.*)

ALGY. I think it rather mean of you, Ernest, I must say. (*Opens case and examines it*) However, it makes no matter, for now that I look at the inscription inside, I find the thing isn't yours after all. (*Turning away.*)

JACK. Of course it is mine. You have seen me with it a hundred times, and you have no right whatsoever to read what is written inside. It is a very ungentlemanly thing to read a private cigar case.

ALGY. (*Turning to JACK*) Yes, but this is not your cigar case. This cigar case is a present from someone of the name of Cecily, and you said you didn't know anyone of that name.

JACK. Well, if you want to know, Cecily happens to be my aunt.

ALGY. Your aunt! (*Goes away and returns C. again.*)

JACK. Yes. Charming old lady she is, too. Lives

at Tunbridge Wells. (*Moves to him*) Just give it back to me, Algy! (*Tries to take case.*)

ALGY. (*Retreating to back of sofa*) But why does she call herself Little Cecily, if she is your aunt and lives at Tunbridge Wells? (*Reading*) "From Little Cecily, with her fondest love."

JACK. (*Moving to sofa and kneeling upon it*) My dear fellow, what on earth is there in *that*? Some aunts are tall, some aunts are not tall. That is a matter that surely an aunt may be allowed to decide for herself. *You* seem to think that every aunt should be exactly like your aunt! (*Second grab for case*) That is absurd! For Heaven's sake, give me back my cigar case. (*Bends across sofa.*)

ALGY. Yes. But why does your aunt call you her uncle? "From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack." (*JACK gradually moves round to R. of sofa. ALGY gradually moves round to R.C.*) There is no objection, I admit, to an aunt being a small aunt, but why an aunt, no matter what her size may be, should call her own nephew her uncle, I can't quite make out. (*JACK moves L.*) Besides, your name isn't Jack at all. It is Ernest.

JACK. It isn't Ernest, it's Jack! (*Moves L.*)

ALGY. (*Going round back of sofa to R.C.*) You always told me it was Ernest. I have introduced you to everyone as Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. You are the most earnest looking person I ever saw in my life. It is perfectly absurd your saying that your name isn't Ernest. It's on your cards. Here is one of them. (*Taking it from case*) Mr. Ernest Worthing, B4, The Albany. I'll keep this as a proof that your name is Ernest if ever you attempt to deny it to me, or to Gwendoline, or to anyone else. (*Puts card in pocket.*)

JACK. Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack

in the country. And the cigar case was given me in the country. (*Sits c.*)

ALGY. Yes, but that does not account for the fact that your small Aunt Cecily who lives at Tunbridge Wells calls you her dear uncle. (JACK *sits R. of table.* ALGY *puts case behind back*) Now, tell me the whole thing. I may mention that I have always suspected you of being a confirmed and secret Bunburyist, and I am quite sure of it now.

JACK. Bunburyist! What on earth do you mean by a Bunburyist?

ALGY. I'll reveal to you the meaning of that incomparable expression as soon as you are kind enough to inform me why you are Ernest in town and Jack in the country. (*Moving to him.*)

JACK. Well, produce my cigar case first. (*Sits R.C. on arm of settee.*)

ALGY. Here it is. (*Hands cigar case*) Now produce your explanation.

JACK. (*Sits c.* ALGY *sits R. of sofa*) Well, old Mr. Thomas Cardew, who adopted me when I was a little boy, made me, in his will, guardian to his granddaughter, Miss Cecily Cardew. Cecily, who addresses me as her uncle, from motives of respect that you could not possibly appreciate, lives at my place in the country, under the charge of her admirable governess, Miss Prism.

ALGY. (*Rises; crosses c.*) Where is that place in the country, by the way?

JACK. That is nothing to you, dear boy. You are not going to be invited. I may tell you candidly that the place is not in Shropshire.

ALGY. I suspected that, my dear fellow. I have Bunburied all over Shropshire on two separate occasions. Now go on. Why are you Ernest in town and Jack in the country? (*Returns and sits on arm R.C.*)

JACK. My dear Algy, when one is placed in the

position of guardian, one has to adopt a very high moral tone on all subjects. It's one's duty to do so. And as a high moral tone can hardly be said to conduce very much to either one's health or happiness, in order to get up to town I have always pretended to have a younger brother of the name of Ernest, who lives at the Albany, and gets into the most dreadful scrapes. There, my dear Algy, is the whole truth, pure and simple.

ALGY. The truth is rarely pure and never simple. (*Rises; crosses to him*) What you are is a Bunburyist. You are one of the most advanced Bunburyists I know.

JACK. What on earth do you mean?

ALGY. You have invented a very useful younger brother called Ernest, in order that you may be able to come up to town as often as you like. I have invented an invaluable permanent invalid called Bunbury, in order that I may go down into the country whenever I choose. Bunbury is *perfectly invaluable*. If it wasn't for Bunbury's extraordinary bad health, for instance, I wouldn't be able to dine with you at the Carlton tonight, for I have been really engaged to Aunt Augusta for more than a week.

JACK. I haven't asked you to dine with me anywhere tonight.

ALGY. I know. You are absurdly careless about sending out invitations. It is very foolish of you. Nothing annoys people so much as not receiving invitations.

JACK. You had much better dine with your Aunt Augusta.

ALGY. (*Sits R.C. on sofa*) I haven't the smallest intention of doing anything of the kind. To begin with, I dined there on Monday, and once a week is quite enough to dine with one's own relations. In the second place, whenever I do dine there I am always treated as a member of the family, and sent

down with either no woman at all or two. In the third place, I know perfectly well who she will place me next to tonight. She will place me next to Mary Farquhar, who always flirts with her own husband across the dinner-table. That is not very pleasant. Indeed, it is not even decent—and that sort of thing is enormously on the increase. The amount of women in London who flirt with their own husbands is perfectly scandalous. It looks so bad. It is simply washing one's clean linen in public. Besides, now that I know you are a confirmed Bunburyist, I naturally want to talk to you about Bunburying. I want to tell you the rules.

JACK. I'm not a Bunburyist at all. If Gwendoline accepts me, I am going to kill my brother; indeed, I think I'll kill him in any case. Cecily is a little too much interested in him. It is rather a bore. So I am going to get rid of Ernest. And I strongly advise you to do the same with Mr.—with your invalid friend who has the absurd name.

ALGY. Nothing will induce me to part with Bunbury, and if you ever get married, which seems to be extremely problematic, you will be very glad to know Bunbury. A man who marries without knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it.

JACK. That is nonsense. If I marry a charming girl like Gwendoline, and she is the only girl I ever saw in my life that I would marry, I certainly don't want to know Bunbury.

ALGY. (*Rises*) Then your wife will. (*Rising and moving to him*) You don't seem to realize, my dear fellow, that in married life *three* is company, and two is none. (*Bell. JACK rises, goes L., and returns L.C.*) Ah, that must be Aunt Augusta. (*Moving to JACK*) Now, if I get her out of the way for ten minutes, so that you can have an opportunity of proposing to Gwendoline, may I dine with you tonight at the Carlton?

JACK. I suppose so, if you want to.

ALGY. Yes, but you must be serious about it. I hate people who are not serious about meals; it is so shallow of them.

LANE. (*Enters R.*) Lady Bracknell and Miss Fairfax. (*ALGY moves R. to meet them. Enter LADY BRACKNELL and GWENDOLINE.*)

LADY BRACKNELL. Well, dear Algernon, I hope you are behaving well. (*Shakes hands; moves R.*)

ALGY. I'm feeling well, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL. That's not quite the same thing; in fact, the two rarely go together. Good afternoon, Mr. Worthing. How d'y'e do?

ALGY. (*To GWENDOLINE*) Dear me, you are smart! (*Moves away to L. of table.*)

GWENDOLINE. (*Crosses L.*) I am always smart. (*Crossing to JACK C.*) Aren't I, Mr. Worthing? (*ALGY R.C.*)

JACK. You are quite perfect, Miss Fairfax. (*ALGY gets L. of table.*)

LADY BRACKNELL. I'm sorry if we are a little late, Algernon, but I was obliged to call on dear Lady Harbury. (*Enter LANE R.C., carrying teapot, which he puts on table; he then moves up to desk.*) I hadn't been there since her poor husband's death. I never saw a woman so altered; she looks quite twenty years younger. I'll have a cup of tea and one of those nice cucumber sandwiches you promised me. (*ALGY table L.C.*) Won't you come and sit here, Gwendoline?

GWENDOLINE. Thanks, Mamma, I'm quite comfortable where I am.

ALGY. (*Picking up empty plate and moving C.*) Good heavens, Lane! (*LANE moves down to him L. GWENDOLINE and JACK move up R.C.*) Why, are there no cucumber sandwiches? I ordered them specially.

LANE. There were no cucumbers in the market

this morning, sir. I went down twice. (*Takes plate.*)

ALGY. No cucumbers?

LANE. No, sir—not even for ready money.

ALGY. That will do, Lane, thank you.

LANE. Thank you, sir. (*Exit R.*)

ALGY. I'm greatly distressed, Aunt Augusta, about there being no cucumbers—not even for ready money.

LADY BRACKNELL. It really makes no matter, Algernon. I had some crumpets with Lady Harbury, who seems to me to be living entirely for pleasure now.

ALGY. I hear that her hair has turned quite gold from grief. (*Moves to R.C. with two cups of tea.*)

LADY BRACKNELL. It certainly has changed color. From what cause, I, of course, can't say. (*ALGY crosses and hands tea; he then gets round back of sofa and sits R. of her*) Thank you. I've quite a treat for you tonight, Algernon. (*JACK gives GWENDOLINE tea at back of L.C. table.*) I am going to send you down with Mary Farquhar. She is such a nice young woman, and so attentive to her husband. It's delightful to watch them.

ALGY. (*R.C.*) I am afraid, Aunt Augusta, I shall have to give up the pleasure of dining with you to-night after all. (*Sits.*)

LADY BRACKNELL. I hope not, Algernon. It would put my table completely out. Your uncle would have to dine upstairs. Fortunately he's accustomed to that. (*JACK and GWENDOLINE return back C.*)

ALGY. It is a great bore, but the fact is I have just had a telegram to say that my poor friend Bunbury is very ill again. (*Exchanges glances with JACK*) They seem to think I should be with him.

LADY BRACKNELL. It is very strange. This Mr. Bunbury seems to suffer from curiously bad health.

ALGY. Yes; poor Bunbury is a dreadful invalid.

LADY BRACKNELL. Well, I must say, Algernon,

that I think it is high time that Mr. Bunbury made up his mind whether he was going to live or die. This shilly-shallying with the question is absurd. Nor do I in any way approve of this *modern* sympathy with invalids. I consider it morbid. Illness of any kind is hardly a thing to be encouraged in others. Health is the primary duty of life. I am always telling that to your poor uncle, but he never seems to take any notice—as far as improvement in his many ailments goes. I would be much obliged if you would ask Mr. Bunbury, from me, to be kind enough not to have a relapse on Saturday, for I rely on you to arrange my music for me. It is my last reception—and one wants *something* that will encourage conversation—particularly at the end of the season when everyone has practically said whatever they have to say.

ALGY. I'll speak to Bunbury, Aunt Augusta—if he is still conscious—(*Rising, taking her cup and crossing L.*)—and I think I can promise you he'll be all right on Saturday. Of course the music is a great difficulty. (*JACK takes GWENDOLINE'S cup to table.*) But I'll run over the program I've drawn out, if you will come into the next room for a moment. (*Crosses to table with two cups.*)

LADY BRACKNELL. Thank you, Algernon. It is very thoughtful of you. (*Rising and following him*) I'm sure the program will be delightful, after a few expurgations. Gwendoline, you will follow.

GWENDOLINE. Certainly, Mamma. (*Crossing over, moves front of sofa R. Exit LADY BRACKNELL with ALGY L., leaving door open.*)

JACK. Charming day it has been, Miss Fairfax.

GWENDOLINE. Pray don't talk to me about the weather, Mr. Worthing. Whenever people talk to me about the weather, I feel quite certain that they mean something else; and that makes me so nervous.

JACK. I *do* mean something else.

GWENDOLINE. I thought so.

JACK. And I would like to be allowed to take advantage of Lady Bracknell's temporary absence——

GWENDOLINE. I would certainly advise you to do so. Mamma has a way of coming back suddenly into a room that I have had to speak to her about.

JACK. (*Crosses to door, shuts it, and returns to GWENDOLINE*) Miss Fairfax, ever since I met you I have admired you more than any girl I have ever met since I met you.

GWENDOLINE. Yes, I am quite aware of that fact. And I often wish that in public, at any rate, you had been more demonstrative. For me, you have always had an irresistible fascination. Even before I met you I was far from indifferent to you. (*JACK looks at her in amazement.*) We live, as I hope you know, Mr. Worthing, in an age of ideals. The fact is constantly mentioned in the more expensive month's magazines. And my ideal has always been to love someone of the name of Ernest. (*JACK backs R.C. to C. and walks down.*) There is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence. The moment Algernon first mentioned to me that he had a friend called Ernest I *knew* I was destined to love you.

JACK. You really love me, Gwendoline?

GWENDOLINE. Passionately!

JACK. Darling! You don't know how happy you've made me. (*Sitting L. of her.*)

GWENDOLINE. My own Ernest! (*Embracing JACK.*)

JACK. Of course. But you don't really mean to say that you couldn't love me if my name wasn't Ernest?

GWENDOLINE. But your name *is* Ernest. (*Releases him.*)

JACK. Yes, I know it is. But supposing it was

something else? Do you mean to say you couldn't love me then?

GWENDOLINE. Oh, that is clearly a metaphysical speculation, and like all metaphysical speculations has very little reference to the actual facts of life, as we know them.

JACK. Personally, darling, to speak quite candidly, I don't care much about the name of Ernest—I don't think the name suits me at all.

GWENDOLINE. It suits you perfectly. It is a divine name. It has a music of its own. It produces vibration.

JACK. Well, really, Gwendoline, I must say that I think there are lots of other much nicer names. I think Jack, for instance, a charming name.

GWENDOLINE. Jack! No, there is very little music in the name Jack, if any at all, indeed. It does not thrill. It produces absolutely *no* vibrations. I have known several Jacks, and they all without exception were more than usually plain. Besides, Jack is a notorious domesticity for John! And I pity any woman who is married to a man called John. She would probably never be allowed to know the entrancing pleasure of a single moment's solitude. The only really *safe* name is Ernest.

JACK. Gwendoline, I must get christened at once—I mean we must get married at once.

GWENDOLINE. (*Surprised*) Married, Mr. Worthing? (*They both rise.*)

JACK. (*Astounded*) Well—surely. You know that I love you, and you led me to believe, Miss Fairfax, that you were not absolutely indifferent to me.

GWENDOLINE. I adore you. But you haven't proposed to me yet. Nothing has been *said* at all about marriage. The subject has not even been touched upon.

JACK. Well—may I propose to you now?

GWENDOLINE. I think it would be an admirable

opportunity. (*Sitting on sofa again*) To spare you any possible disappointment, Mr. Worthing, I think it only fair to tell you quite frankly beforehand that I am fully determined to accept you.

JACK. Then, Gwendoline, you will marry me? (*Goes on his knees.*)

GWENDOLINE. Of course I will, darling. (*Putting arms round his neck*) How long you have been about it! I am afraid you have had very little experience in how to propose.

JACK. My own one, I have never loved anyone in the world but you.

GWENDOLINE. Yes, but men often propose for practice. Oh, Ernest, what wonderfully blue eyes you have. They are quite, quite blue. I hope you will always look at me just like that, especially when there are other people present.

LADY BRACKNELL. (*Enters L.*) Mr. Worthing! (*JACK tries to get up. GWENDOLINE restrains him.*) Rise, sir, from this semi-recumbent posture. It is most indecorous.

GWENDOLINE. Mamma! (*He tries to rise; she restrains him*) I must beg you to retire. This is no place for you. (*Another movement from JACK*) Besides, Mr. Worthing has not quite finished yet.

LADY BRACKNELL. Finished what, may I ask?

GWENDOLINE. I am engaged to Mr. Worthing, Mamma. (*Rising and helping him up.*)

LADY BRACKNELL. Pardon me, you are not engaged to anyone. (*Crosses c.*) When you do become engaged to anyone, I or your father, should his health permit him, will inform you of the fact. An engagement should always come on a young girl as a surprise, pleasant or unpleasant, as the case may be. It is hardly a matter that she should be allowed to arrange for herself. And now I have a few questions to put to you, Mr. Worthing. And while I am making these inquiries, you, Gwendoline,

will wait for me below in the carriage. (*Moves L. a little.*)

GWENDOLINE. (*Reproachfully*) Mamma!

LADY BRACKNELL. (*Severely*) In the carriage, Gwendoline! (*GWENDOLINE and JACK move up R. and blow kisses to each other behind LADY BRACKNELL'S back. LADY BRACKNELL looks vaguely about as if she cannot understand what the noise is; finally turns*) Gwendoline, the carriage!

GWENDOLINE. Yes, Mamma. (*Exits R.*)

LADY BRACKNELL. (*Sitting down L.C.*) You can take a seat, Mr. Worthing. (*Looks in her pocket for notebook and pencil.*)

JACK. Thank you, Lady Bracknell. I prefer standing. (*Comes down c.*)

LADY BRACKNELL. (*Pencil and notebook in hand*) I feel bound to tell you that you are not *down* on my list of eligible young men; although I have the same list as the dear Duchess of Bolton has. We work together, in fact. However, I am quite ready to enter your name, should your answers be what a really affectionate mother requires. Do you smoke?

JACK. Well, yes, I must admit I smoke.

LADY BRACKNELL. I am glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some kind. There are far too many idle men in London as it is. How *old* are you?

JACK. Thirty-five.

LADY BRACKNELL. A very good age to be married at. I have always been of opinion that a man who desires to get married should either know everything or nothing. Which do you know?

JACK. I know nothing, Lady Bracknell. (*Moving R.*)

LADY BRACKNELL. I am pleased to hear it. I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is like a delicate, exotic fruit;

touch it and the bloom has gone. What is your income?

JACK. Between seven and eight thousand a year.

LADY BRACKNELL. (*Makes a note in her book*) In land or in investments?

JACK. In investments, chiefly. (*Sitting sofa R.C.*)

LADY BRACKNELL. That is satisfactory. What between the duties expected of one during one's lifetime and the duties exacted from one after one's death, land has ceased to be either a profit or a pleasure. It gives one position and prevents one from keeping it up. That's all that can be said about land.

JACK. I have a country house, with some land, of course, attached to it; about fifteen hundred acres, I believe, but I don't depend on that for my real income. As far as I can see, the poachers are the only people who make anything out of it.

LADY BRACKNELL. A country house? How many bedrooms? Well, that point can be cleared up afterwards. (*Makes note*) You have a *town* house, I hope? A girl with a simple unspoiled nature like Gwendoline could hardly be expected to reside in the country.

JACK. Well, I own a house in Belgrave Square, but it is let by the year to Lady Bloxham. Of course I can get it back whenever I like, at six months' notice.

LADY BRACKNELL. (*Severely*) Lady Bloxam? I don't know her.

JACK. Oh, she goes about very little. She's a lady considerably advanced in years.

LADY BRACKNELL. Ah, nowadays that is no guarantee of respectability of character. What number in Belgrave Square?

JACK. One hundred and forty-nine.

LADY BRACKNELL. (*Closing pocket-book*) The unfashionable side. I thought there was something!

However, that could easily be altered. Now to minor matters. Are your parents living? (*Turning to JACK.*)

JACK. I have lost both my parents.

LADY BRACKNELL. Both? To lose one parent may be regarded as a misfortune—to lose both seems like carelessness. Who was your father? He seems to have been a man of wealth. Was he born in what the Radical papers call the purple of commerce, or did he rise from the ranks of the aristocracy?

JACK. I am afraid I really don't know. The fact is, Lady Bracknell, I said I had lost my parents. It would be nearer the truth to say that my parents seem to have lost me—I don't actually know who I am, by birth. I was—well—I was found. (*Rises.*)

LADY BRACKNELL. Found!

JACK. The late Mr. Thomas Cardew, an old gentleman of a very charitable and kindly disposition, found me, and gave me the name of Worthing, because he happened to have a first-class ticket for Worthing in his pocket at the time.

LADY BRACKNELL. *Where* did the charitable gentleman who had a first-class ticket for Worthing find you?

JACK. (*Gravely*) In a handbag.

LADY BRACKNELL. A handbag!

JACK. (*Very seriously*) Yes, Lady Bracknell. I was in a handbag—a somewhat large leather handbag, with handles to it—an ordinary handbag, in fact.

LADY BRACKNELL. In what locality did this Mr. Thomas Cardew come across this ordinary handbag?

JACK. In the cloakroom at Victoria Station. It was given him in mistake for his own.

LADY BRACKNELL. (*Rising*) Mr. Worthing, I confess I feel somewhat bewildered by what you have just told me. To be born, or at any rate, bred, in a handbag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me

to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that remind one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution—and I presume you know what that unfortunate movement led to? As for the particular locality in which the handbag was found, a cloakroom at a railway station might serve to conceal a social indiscretion—has probably, indeed, been used for that purpose before now—but it can hardly be regarded as an assured basis for a recognized position in good society.

JACK. May I ask you then what you would advise me to do? I need hardly say I would do anything in the world to insure Gwendoline's happiness.

LADY BRACKNELL. I would strongly advise you, Mr. Worthing, to try and acquire some relations as soon as possible, and to make a definite effort to produce, at any rate, one parent, of either sex, before the season is quite over.

JACK. Well, I don't see how I can possibly manage to do that. I can produce the handbag at any moment. It is in my dressing-room at home. I really think *that* should satisfy you, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL. (*Crossing*) Me, sir? What has it to do with me? You can hardly imagine that I and Lord Bracknell would dream of allowing our only daughter—a girl brought up with the utmost care—to marry into a cloakroom, and form an alliance with a handbag. Good morning, Mr. Worthing. (*Exits R.*)

JACK. Good morning. (*ALGERNON, inside, strikes up the "Wedding March."* JACK looks perfectly furious, then runs across and off L. into room.) For goodness' sake, don't play that ghastly tune, Algy! (*Re-enters and goes c.*) How idiotic you are!

ALGY. (*Enters L. Cheerily*) Didn't it go off all right, old boy? You don't mean to say Gwendoline refused you? (*Moves up to desk and gets cigarettes, brings down box and offers JACK one.*)

JACK. Oh, as far as Gwendoline is concerned, we are engaged. Her mother is perfectly unbearable. Never met such a gorgon. You don't think there is any chance of Gwendoline becoming like her mother in about a hundred and fifty years, do you, Algy?

ALGY. (*Moving down R.C., drawlingly and sententiously*) All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's *his*. (*Puts box on c. table.*)

JACK. Is that clever? (*Sits sofa R.*)

ALGY. It is perfectly phrased, and quite as true as any observation in civilized life need be.

JACK. I am sick to death of cleverness. Everybody is clever nowadays. You can't go anywhere without meeting clever people. The thing has become an absolute public nuisance. I wish to goodness we had a few fools left.

ALGY. We have.

JACK. I should extremely like to meet them. What do they talk about?

ALGY. The fools? Oh, about the clever people, of course. (*Brings chair to c. and sits*) By the way, did you tell Gwendoline the truth about your being Ernest in town and Jack in the country?

JACK. (*In a very patronizing manner*) My dear fellow, the truth isn't quite the sort of thing one tells to a nice sweet, refined girl. What extraordinary ideas you have about the way to behave to a woman.

ALGY. The only way to behave to a woman is to make love to her if she is pretty, and to someone else if she is plain.

JACK. Oh, that is nonsense.

ALGY. What about your brother? What about the *profligate* Ernest?

JACK. Oh, before the end of the week I shall have got rid of him; I'll say he died in Paris of apoplexy.

Lots of people die of apoplexy quite suddenly, don't they?

ALGY. Yes, but it's hereditary, my dear fellow. It's a sort of thing that runs in families. You had much better say a severe chill.

JACK. You are sure a severe chill isn't hereditary or anything of that kind?

ALGY. Of course it isn't.

JACK. Very well, then. My poor brother Ernest is carried off suddenly in Paris, by a severe chill. That gets rid of him.

ALGY. But I thought you said that—Miss Cardew was a little too much interested in your poor brother Ernest?

JACK. Oh, that is all right. Cecily is not a silly, romantic girl at all. She has a capital appetite, and goes long walks, and pays no attention at all to her lessons.

ALGY. I should like to see Cecily.

JACK. I will take very good care you never do. She is excessively pretty, and she is only just eighteen.

ALGY. Have you told Gwendoline that you have an excessively pretty young ward who is only just eighteen?

JACK. Oh, one doesn't blurt these things out to people. Cecily and Gwendoline are perfectly certain to be extremely great friends. I bet you anything you like that half an hour after they have met they will be calling each other sister.

ALGY. (*Rising and putting chair back*) Women only do that when they have called each other a lot of other things first. Now, my dear boy, if we want to get a good table at the Carlton we really must go and dress. I'm hungry.

JACK. (C.) I never knew you when you weren't. (*Crosses L.C.*)

ALGY. (R.C.) What shall we do after dinner? Go to a theatre?

JACK. Oh, no! I *loathe* listening.

ALGY. Well, let us go to the Club?

JACK. Oh, no! I *hate* talking.

ALGY. Well—(*Goes up c.*)—we might trot round to the Empire at ten.

JACK. Oh, no! I can't bear *looking* at things.

ALGY. Well, what *shall* we do?

JACK. Oh, nothing.

LANE. (*Enters R.*) Miss Fairfax. (*Enter GWENDOLINE R. She goes down c. Exit LANE, leaving door open.*)

ALGY. Gwendoline, upon my word.

GWENDOLINE. (*Turning him round*) Algy, kindly turn your back. I have something very particular to say to Mr. Worthing.

ALGY. Really, Gwendoline, I don't think I can allow this at all.

GWENDOLINE. Algy, pray oblige me by turning your back. (*Turns him round again. ALGY turns away up c. to fireplace. Moving down R.C. to JACK*) Ernest, we may never be married. From the expression on mamma's face I fear we never shall. Few parents nowadays pay any regard to what their children say to them. The old-fashioned respect for the young is rapidly dying out. (R.C.) Whatever influence I ever had over mamma I lost at the age of three. But though she may prevent us from becoming man and wife, and I may marry someone else, and marry often, nothing that she can possibly do can alter my eternal devotion to you.

JACK. (R.) Dear Gwendoline!

GWENDOLINE. (R.C.) The story of your romantic origin, as related to me by mamma, with unpleasing comments, has naturally stirred the deeper fibres of my nature. Your Christian name is an irresistible fascination. (*Embracing him*) The simplicity of

your character makes you exquisitely incomprehensible to me. (*Getting away a little*) Your town address at the Albany I have. What is your address—(*Taking out notebook*)—in the country?

JACK. The Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire. (*ALGY writes the address on shirt cuff, then picks up railway guide.*)

GWENDOLINE. How long do you remain in town? (*Goes a little R.*)

JACK. Till Monday.

GWENDOLINE. Good! Algy, you may turn round now.

ALGY. Thanks, I've turned round already.

GWENDOLINE. (*To ALGY*) You may also ring the bell.

JACK. You will let me see you to your carriage, my own darling.

GWENDOLINE. Certainly.

JACK. (*To LANE, who now appears in hall*) I will see Miss Fairfax out.

LANE. Yes, sir. (*Exeunt JACK and GWENDOLINE R.C. LANE enters room and presents two letters on salver to ALGY, who is seated at desk up C. It is to be surmised that they are bills, for ALGY tears them up.*)

ALGY. A glass of sherry, Lane.

LANE. Yes, sir. (*Hands sherry.*)

ALGY. To-morrow, Lane, I'm going Bunburying.

LANE. Yes, sir.

ALGY. I shall probably not be back till Monday. You can put up my dress clothes, my smoking jacket, and all the Bunbury suits.

LANE. Yes, sir. (*Handing sherry.*)

ALGY. (*Rising and coming down R.*) I hope to-morrow will be a fine day, Lane.

LANE. It never is, sir.

ALGY. Lane, you are a perfect pessimist.

LANE. I do my best to give satisfaction, sir. (*Exit L. ALGY crosses C. to table and puts glass down.*)

JACK. (*Enters R.C.*) There's a sensible, intellectual girl; the only girl I ever cared for in my life. (*ALGY is laughing immoderately.*) What on earth are you so amused at?

ALGY. (*C.*) Oh, I'm a little anxious about poor Bunbury, that is all.

JACK. (*R.C.*) If you don't take care, your friend Bunbury will get you into a serious scrape some day.

ALGY. I love scrapes. They are the only things that are never serious.

JACK. Oh, that's nonsense, Algy; you never talk anything but nonsense.

ALGY. Nobody ever does. Besides, I love nonsense! (*JACK looks indignantly and leaves the room. ALGERNON lights a cigarette, reads shirt cuff, and smiles*) The Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire.

QUICK CURTAIN

ACT TWO

SCENE: *Garden at the Manor House. Door leading into house R. The garden is an old-fashioned one, full of roses, yew hedges, etc. Time of year, July. Basket chairs, and table covered with books.*

MISS PRISM *discovered seated L. of table.*
CECILY *up R., watering flowers.*

MISS PRISM. (*C. on settee, calling*) Cecily! Cecily! Surely it is more Moulton's duty to water the flowers than yours. Your German grammar is on the table. Pray open it at page fifteen. We will repeat yesterday's lesson.

CECILY. But I don't like German. It isn't at all a becoming language. I know perfectly well that I always look quite plain after my German lesson.

MISS PRISM. Child, you know how anxious your guardian is that you should improve yourself in every way. He laid particular stress on your German, as he was leaving for town yesterday.

CECILY. Dear Uncle Jack is so very serious—sometimes he is so serious that I think he cannot be quite well. (*Puts down can and moves to R. of stage.*)

MISS PRISM. Your guardian enjoys the best of health—and his gravity of demeanor is specially to be commended in one so comparatively young as he is. I know no one who has a higher sense of duty and responsibility.

CECILY. (*Moving R. of C. table*) I suppose that is why he so often looks a little bored when we three are together.

MISS PRISM. Cecily, I am surprised at you! Mr. Worthing has many troubles in his life. Idle merit and triviality would be out of place in his conversation. You must remember his constant anxiety about that unfortunate young man, his brother.

CECILY. I wish Uncle Jack would allow him to come here sometimes. We might have a good influence over him, Miss Prism. I am sure you certainly would. (*Goes c. and sitting R. of table*) You know German and geology, and things of that kind, that influence a man so much. (*Begins to write in her diary.*)

MISS PRISM. (*Shaking her head*) I do not think that even I would produce any effect on a character that, according to his own brother's admission, is irretrievably weak and vacillating. Indeed, I am not sure that I would *desire* to reclaim him. I am not in favor of this modern mania for turning bad people into good people at a moment's notice. You must put away your diary, Cecily. I really don't see why you should keep a diary at all.

CECILY. I keep a diary in order to enter the wonderful secrets of my life. If I didn't write them down I would probably forget all about them.

MISS PRISM. Memory, my dear Cecily, is the diary we all carry about with us.

CECILY. Yes, but it usually chronicles the things that have never happened and couldn't possibly have happened. I believe that memory is responsible for nearly all the novels that Mudie sends us. (*Puts diary on table.*)

MISS PRISM. Do not speak slightly of novels, Cecily. I wrote one myself in earlier days.

CECILY. *Was* your novel ever published?

MISS PRISM. Alas, no. The manuscript unfortunately was abandoned. (*CECILY looks at her, then rises and moves up c.*) I use the word in the sense

of lost or mislaid. To your work, child; these speculations are profitless.

CECILY. (*Going L., back of table*) But I see dear Doctor Chasuble coming up through the garden.

MISS PRISM. (*Rising and advancing L.*) Doctor Chasuble! This is indeed a pleasure.

CANON CHASUBLE. (*Enters through the door L. in garden wall*) And how are we this morning? (*Crosses and shakes hands*) Miss Prism, you are, I trust, well?

CECILY. (*Behind table*) Miss Prism has just been complaining of a slight headache. I think it would do her so much good to have a short stroll with you in the park, Dr. Chasuble.

MISS PRISM. Cecily, I have not mentioned anything about a headache. (*Sits.*)

CECILY. No, dear Miss Prism, I know that, but I felt instinctively that you had a headache. Indeed, I was thinking about it, and not about my German lesson, when the dear rector came in.

CHASUBLE. I hope, Cecily, you are not inattentive. (*Sits c.*)

CECILY. Oh, I am afraid I am.

CHASUBLE. That is strange. Were I fortunate enough to be Miss Prism's pupil I would hang upon her lips. (*MISS PRISM glares. CECILY moves up behind table.*) I spoke metaphorically—the metaphor was drawn from bees. Ahem! Mr. Worthing, I suppose, has not returned from town yet.

MISS PRISM. We do not expect him till Monday afternoon.

CHASUBLE. Ah, yes, he usually likes to spend his Sunday in London. He is not one of those whose sole aim is enjoyment, as, by all accounts, that unfortunate young man, his brother, seems to be. (*Rising*) But I must not disturb Egeria and her pupil any longer. (*Moves over toward her.*)

MISS PRISM. (*Rising*) Egeria? My name is Letitia, Doctor.

CHASUBLE. A classical allusion merely, drawn from the Pagan authors. I will see you both, no doubt, at evensong?

MISS PRISM. I think, dear Doctor, I will have a stroll with you. I find I have a headache after all, and a walk might do it good.

CHASUBLE. With pleasure, Miss Prism, with pleasure. We might go as far as the schools and back.

MISS PRISM. (*Crossing to CECILY, R.C.*) That will be delightful. Cecily, you will read your "Political Economy" in my absence; the chapter on the "Fall of the Rupee" you may omit. (*Returns*) It is somewhat too exciting for a young girl. (*Exit L. with CHASUBLE.*)

CECILY. (*Picks up books and throws them back on table*) Horrid Political Economy! Horrid Geography! (*Rises; stands L. of table*) Horrid, horrid German!

MERRIMAN. (*Enters R. Presents card on salver*) Mr. Ernest Worthing has just driven over from the station. He has brought his luggage with him.

CECILY. "Mr. Ernest Worthing, B4., The Albany, W." Uncle Jack's brother! Did you tell him that Mr. Worthing was in town? (*Moves to front of table.*)

MERRIMAN. Yes, Miss. He seemed very much disappointed. I told him that you and Miss Prism were in the garden. He said he was anxious to speak to you privately for a moment.

CECILY. Ask Mr. Ernest Worthing to come out here. I suppose you had better speak to the house-keeper about a room for him.

MERRIMAN. Yes, Miss. (*Exits R.*)

CECILY. I have never met any really wicked person before. I feel rather frightened. (*Moves L.C.*)

I am afraid he will look just like anyone else. (*Enter ALGY, very gay and debonnaire. He is shown in by MERRIMAN.*) He does!

ALGY. (*Raising his hat*) You are my little cousin, Cecily, I'm sure.

CECILY. You are under some strange mistake. I am not little. In fact, I believe I am more than usually tall for my age. (*ALGY is taken aback.*) But I am Cousin Cecily. You, I see from your card, are Uncle Jack's brother—my Cousin Ernest. My wicked Cousin Ernest.

ALGY. I am not really wicked at all, Cousin Cecily. You mustn't think I am wicked.

CECILY. If you are not, then you have certainly been deceiving us all in a very inexcusable manner. I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be *wicked* and being really good all the time. That would be hypocrisy.

ALGY. (*Looking at her in amazement*) Oh! Of course I have been rather reckless.

CECILY. I am glad to hear it. (*Sitting on settee.*)

ALGY. In fact, now you mention the subject, I have been very bad in my own small way.

CECILY. I don't think you should be so proud of that, though I am sure it must have been very pleasant.

ALGY. It is much pleasanter being here with you. (*Sitting R.C.*)

CECILY. I can't understand how you are here at all. Uncle Jack won't be back till Monday afternoon.

ALGY. This is a great disappointment, as I am obliged to go up on Monday morning.

CECILY. I think you had better wait till Uncle Jack arrives. I know he wants to speak to you about your emigrating.

ALGY. About my what? (*Startled.*)

CECILY. Your emigrating. He is sending you to Australia.

ALGY. Australia! (*Rising and moving R.C.*) I'd sooner die.

CECILY. Well, he said at dinner on Wednesday night you would have to choose between this world, the next world, and Australia.

ALGY. Oh, well. (*Returning and sitting c.*) The accounts I have received of Australia and the next world are not encouraging. This world is good enough for me, Cousin Cecily.

CECILY. Yes, but are you good enough for it?

ALGY. I'm afraid I'm not that. That is why I want you to reform me. You might make that your mission, if you don't mind, Cousin Cecily.

CECILY. I'm afraid I've no time this afternoon.

ALGY. Well, would you mind my reforming myself, this afternoon?

CECILY. It is rather quixotic of you—but I think you should try.

ALGY. I will. I feel better already.

CECILY. You are looking a little worse. (*Rising.*)

ALGY. That is because I am hungry.

CECILY. (*Crossing R. to steps*) How thoughtless of me. (*Crosses R.C. ALGY rises and follows.*) I should have remembered that when one is going to lead an entirely new life, one requires regular and wholesome meals. (*Moves to door R.*) Won't you come in?

ALGY. Thank you. (*Moving to her*) Won't you give me a rose?

CECILY. A Marechal Niel? (*Picks up scissors and looks up right back.*)

ALGY. No, I'd sooner have a pink rose.

CECILY. Why? (*Cuts flower.*)

ALGY. Because *you* are like a pink rose, Cousin Cecily.

CECILY. I don't think it can be right for you to talk to me like that. *Miss Prism* never says such things to me.

ALGY. Then Miss Prism is a very short-sighted old lady. (CECILY offers him rose and puts it in his buttonhole.) You are the prettiest girl I ever saw.

CECILY. Miss Prism says that all good looks are a snare.

ALGY. They are a snare that every sensible man would like to be caught in.

CECILY. Oh, I don't think I would care to catch a sensible man. I wouldn't know what to talk to him about. (*Exeunt into house R.*)

MISS PRISM. (*Enters with CHASUBLE from door L., crossing C., then sits R. of table*) Where is Cecily? You are too much alone, dear Doctor Chasuble. You should get married. A misanthrope I can understand—a womanthrope, never!

CHASUBLE. Believe me, I do not deserve so Neologistic a phrase. The precept, as well as the practice, of the Primitive Church was distinctly against matrimony.

MISS PRISM. That is obviously the reason why the Primitive Church has not lasted up to the present day. And you do not seem to realize, dear Doctor, that by persistently remaining single, a man converts himself into a permanent public temptation. Men should be more careful; this very celibacy leads weaker vessels astray.

CHASUBLE. (*On settee*) But is a man not equally attractive when married?

MISS PRISM. No married man is ever attractive except to his wife.

CHASUBLE. And often, I've been told, not even to her. (*Putting his hand over hers on table.*)

MISS PRISM. But where is Cecily? (*Rises and moves to steps.*)

CHASUBLE. (*Rising and moving L.*) Perhaps she followed us to the schools.

(*Enter JACK from back of garden R. He comes*

is dressed entirely in black. MISS PRISM shakes his hand. JACK takes out his handkerchief and puts it to his eyes.)

MISS PRISM. Mr. Worthing!

CHASUBLE. Mr. Worthing.

MISS PRISM. This is indeed a surprise. We did not look for you till Monday afternoon.

JACK. (*Shakes MISS PRISM's hand in a tragic manner*) I have returned sooner than I expected. Doctor Chasuble, I hope you are well.

CHASUBLE. Dear Mr. Worthing, I trust this garb of woe does not betoken some terrible calamity.

JACK. My brother!

MISS PRISM. More shameful debts and extravagancies?

CHASUBLE. Still leading his life of pleasure?

JACK. (*Shaking his head*) Dead! (*Putting handkerchief to his eyes.*)

CHASUBLE. Your brother Ernest dead?

JACK. Quite dead.

MISS PRISM. What a lesson for him. I trust he will profit by it. (*Sits R.*)

CHASUBLE. Mr. Worthing, I offer you my sincere condolences. You have at least the consolation of knowing that you were always the most generous and forgiving of brothers.

JACK. (*Handkerchief business*) Poor Ernest. He had many faults, but it is a sad blow.

CHASUBLE. Very sad indeed. Were you with him at the end?

JACK. No, he died abroad in Paris. I had a telegram last night from the manager of the Grand Hotel.

CHASUBLE. Was the cause of his death mentioned?

JACK. A severe chill, it seems.

CHASUBLE. (*Raising his hand*) None of us are

perfect. I myself am particularly susceptible to draughts. Will the—interment take place here?

JACK. No. He seems to have expressed the desire to be buried in Paris. (CHASUBLE *helps JACK to sit c.*)

CHASUBLE. In Paris. (*Shakes his head*) I fear that hardly points to any very serious state of mind at the last. You would no doubt wish me to make some slight allusion to this tragic domestic affliction next Sunday. (JACK *presses his hand convulsively.*) My sermon on the meaning of the manna in the Wilderness can be adapted to almost any occasion, joyful or, as in the present case, distressing. (*Long pause*) I have preached it at harvest celebrations, christenings, confirmations, on days of humiliation and festal days. The last time I delivered it was in the Cathedral, as a charity sermon on behalf the Society for the Prevention of Discontent Among the Upper Classes. The Bishop, who was present, was much *struck* by some of the analogies I drew.

JACK. (*Rising*) Ah, that reminds me, you mentioned christenings, I think, Doctor Chasuble. I suppose you know how to christen, all right? (CHASUBLE *looks astounded.*) I mean, of course, you are continually christening, aren't you?

MISS PRISM. It is, I regret to say, one of the Rector's most constant duties in this parish. I have often spoken to the poorer classes on the subject. But they don't seem to know what thrift is.

CHASUBLE. (*Moving c. to JACK*) But is there any particular infant in whom you are interested, Mr. Worthing? Your brother was, I believe, unmarried, was he not?

JACK. (*Mournfully*) Oh, yes. Quite unmarried.

MISS PRISM. (*Bitterly*) People who live entirely for pleasure usually are.

JACK. Oh, it is not for any child, dear Doctor. I am very fond of children. No, the fact is, I would

like to be christened myself, this afternoon, if you have nothing better to do.

CHASUBLE. But sure'y, Mr. Worthing, you have been christened already.

JACK. I don't remember anything about it. Of course, I don't know if the thing would bother you in any way, or if you think I am a little too old now.

CHASUBLE. Not at all. The sprinkling and indeed immersion of adults is a perfectly canonical practice.

JACK. Immersion? (*With a shudder.*)

CHASUBLE. Oh, no. You need have no apprehensions. Sprinkling is all that is necessary, or indeed I think advisable. Our weather is so changeable. What hour would you wish the ceremony to be performed?

JACK. (C.) Oh, I might trot round about five, if that would suit you.

CHASUBLE. (L.C.) Oh, perfectly! In fact I have two similar ceremonies to perform at that time. A case of twins that occurred recently in one of the out-lying cottages on your own estate. Poor Jenkins, the carter, a most hard-working man.

JACK. Oh! I don't see much fun in being christened a'long with other babies. It would be childish. Would half-past five do?

CHASUBLE. Admirably, admirably! (*Takes out watch*) And now, dear Mr. Worthing, I will not intrude any longer into a house of sorrow. I would merely beg you not to be too much bowed down by grief. What seem to us bitter trials are often blessings in disguise. (*Moves L.*)

MISS PRISM. (*Moving up R.C.*) This seems to me a blessing of an *extremely obvious* kind. (*Rises and moves round back stage to L.*)

CECILY. (*Enters R.*) Uncle Jack! Oh, I *am* pleased to see you back. What horrid clothes you have got on. Do go and change them.

MISS PRISM. Cecily!

CECILY. (*Goes toward JACK. He kisses her brow*

in a melancholy manner) What is the matter, Uncle Jack? (*JACK turns away, crying.*) Do look happy! You look as if you had toothache, and I have got such a surprise. (*MISS PRISM has moved over to L. to DR. CHASUBLE.*) Who do you think is in the dining-room? Your brother!

JACK. Who?

CECILY. Your brother Ernest. He arrived here half an hour ago.

JACK. What nonsense! I haven't got a brother.

CECILY. Oh, don't say that! However badly he may have behaved to you in the past, he is still your brother. You couldn't be so heartless as to disown him. I'll tell him to come out. And you will shake hands with him, won't you, Uncle Jack? (*Exits R.*)

CHASUBLE. These are very joyful tidings.

MISS PRISM. After we had all been resigned to his loss, his sudden return seems to me *peculiarly* distressing.

JACK. My brother is in the dining-room? I don't know what it all means. I think it is perfectly absurd. (*Enter ALGY and CECILY R. ALGY goes R. CECILY goes to R.C.*) Good heavens! (*Motions him away*) Go away.

ALGY. Brother John, I have come down from town to tell you that I am very sorry for all the trouble I have given you, and I intend to lead a better life in the future.

JACK. (*Glares at him and does not take his hand*) Go away.

CECILY. (*Coming down and touching him on the shoulder*) Uncle Jack, you are not going to refuse your own brother's hand?

JACK. Nothing will induce me to take his hand. I think his coming down here is disgraceful. He knows perfectly well why.

CECILY. Uncle Jack, do be nice. There is some good in everyone. Ernest has been telling me about

his poor invalid friend whom he goes to visit so often. (JACK *walks up and down c.*)

ALGY. Of course I admit that the faults were all on my side. But I must say that I think brother John's coldness to me is peculiarly painful. I expected a more enthusiastic welcome, especially considering it is the first time I have come here. (JACK *moves up R.C.*)

CECILY. (*Pulling JACK across to ALGY, L.C.*) Uncle Jack, if you don't shake hands with Ernest I will never forgive you. (*Joins MISS PRISM, who is with DR. CHASUBLE, L.*)

JACK. I suppose I must, then.

CHASUBLE. It's pleasant, is it not, to see so perfect a reconciliation? I think we might leave the two brothers together.

MISS PRISM. Cecily, you will come with me.

CECILY. Certainly, Miss Prism. (ALGY *gets c.* *Exeunt* CECILY and MISS PRISM, *arm in arm*, and DR. CHASUBLE.)

JACK. (*Down R.C.; shakes hands*) You young scoundrel! Algy, you must get out of this place as soon as possible. I don't allow any Bunburying here.

MERRIMAN. (*Enters R.*) I have put Mr. Ernest's things in the room next to yours, sir. I suppose that is all right?

JACK. What?

MERRIMAN. Mr. Ernest's luggage, sir. I have unpacked it and put it in the room next to your own.

ALGY. (*Takes off hat and puts it on table*) I am afraid I can't stay more than a week this time. (*Looks after CECILY.*)

JACK. Merriman, order the dog-cart at once. Mr. Ernest has been suddenly called back to town.

MERRIMAN. Yes, sir. (*Exit R.*)

ALGY. (*Turning to JACK*) Jack, Cecily is a darling.

JACK. You are not to talk of Miss Cardew like that. I don't like it.

ALGY. Well, I don't like your clothes. You look perfectly ridiculous in them. Why on earth don't you go up and change? It is perfectly childish to be in deep mourning for a man who happens to be staying for a week with you in your own house as a guest. I call it grotesque.

JACK. You are certainly not staying with me for a week as a guest or anything else. You have got to leave—by the four-five train.

ALGY. I certainly won't leave you as long as you are in mourning. It would be most unfriendly. If I were in mourning you would stay with me, I suppose. I should think it very unkind if you didn't.

JACK. Well, will you go if I change my clothes?

ALGY. Yes, if you are not too long. I never saw anybody take so long to dress, and with such little result.

JACK. Well, at any rate, that is better than being always overdressed, as you are. (*Exit R.*)

ALGY. I'm in love with Cecily. (*Enter CECILY L.*) I must see her before I go. Ah, there she is!

CECILY. Oh, I merely came back to water the flowers. I thought you were with Uncle Jack.

ALGY. He's gone to order the dog-cart for me.

CECILY. Oh, is he going to take you for a nice drive?

ALGY. He's going to send me away.

CECILY. Then we have got to part. (*Moves to seat L.C. and sits.*)

ALGY. (*After a pause*) I'm afraid so. (*Sits beside her.*)

MERRIMAN. (*Enters R.*) The dog-cart is at the door, sir.

CECILY. It can wait, Merriman—(*Rises*)—for—five minutes. (*Crossing R.C.*)

MERRIMAN. Yes, Miss. (*Exit R.*)

ALGY. (*Pulls out his watch; rises*) I hope, Cecily, I shall not offend you if I state quite frankly and openly that you seem to me to be in every way the visible personification of absolute perfection.

CECILY. I think your frankness does you great credit, Ernest. If you will allow me I will copy your remarks into my diary. (*Goes over to table and begins writing in diary.*)

ALGY. Do you really keep a diary? (*Sitting c.*) I'd give anything to look at it. May I?

CECILY. Oh, no! (*Puts hand over it*) You see, it is simply a very young girl's record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently not meant for publication. But pray, Ernest, don't stop. I delight in taking down from dictation. I have reached "absolute perfection." (*Sits R.C.*) You can go on. I am quite ready for more.

ALGY. (*Speaking very rapidly*) Cecily, ever since I first looked upon your wonderful and incomparable beauty, I have dared to love you wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly.

CECILY. I don't think you should tell me that you love me wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly. Hopelessly doesn't seem to make much sense, does it?

ALGY. Cecily! (*Rising; leaning over the table.*)

MERRIMAN. (*Enters R.*) The dog-cart is waiting, sir.

ALGY. (*Rises, crossing R. back*) Tell it to come round next week at the same hour.

MERRIMAN. (*Looking at CECILY, who makes no sign*) Yes, sir. (*Exit R.*)

CECILY. (*Rising and moving c.*) Uncle Jack would be very much annoyed if he knew you were staying on till next week, at the same hour.

ALGY. Oh, I don't care about Jack. I don't care for anybody in the whole world but you. I love you, Cecily. You will marry me, won't you?

CECILY. You silly boy! Of course. Why, we have been engaged for the last three months.

ALGY. For the last three months?

CECILY. Yes. It will be exactly three months on Thursday.

ALGY. (*Sits on table*) But *how* did we become engaged?

CECILY. Well—(*Sits on sofa L.C.*)—ever since dear Unc'e Jack first confessed to us that he had a younger brother who was very wicked and bad, you, of course, have formed the chief topic of conversation between myself and Miss Prism. And, of course, a man who is much talked about is always very attractive. One feels there must be something in him after all. I dare-say it was foolish of me, but I fell in love with you, Ernest.

ALGY. Darling! And when was the engagement actually settled? (*ALGY embraces CECILY.*)

CECILY. On the 14th of April last. Worn out by your entire ignorance of my existence, I determined to end the matter one way or the other, and after a long struggle with myself, I accepted you here. The next day I bought this little ring in your name, and this is the little bangle with the true lover's knot I promised you always to wear.

ALGY. Did I give you this? It's very pretty, isn't it?

CECILY. (*Rising and crossing R.*) Yes, you've wonderfully good taste, Ernest. It's the excuse I've always given for your leading such a bad life. (*Then moving up to table*) And this is the box in which I keep all your dear letters. (*Kneels at table, opens box and produces letters tied up with blue ribbon.*)

ALGY. My letters! (*Standing C.*) But my own sweet Cecily, I have never written—you any letters.

CECILY. You need hardly remind me of that, Ernest. I remember only too well that I was forced

to write your letters for you. I wrote always three times a week, and sometimes oftener.

ALGY. Oh, do let me read them, Cecily!

CECILY. (*Sits R.C. table*) Oh, I couldn't possibly. They would make you far too conceited. (*Replaces box.*)

ALGY. (*Crossing to her and kneeling*) What a perfect angel you are, Cecily!

CECILY. You dear romantic boy! (*He kisses her. She puts her fingers through his hair*) I hope your hair curls naturally. Does it?

ALGY. Yes, darling, with a little help from others.

CECILY. I am so glad!

ALGY. You'll never break off our engagement, Cecily?

CECILY. I don't think I could break it off, now that I have actually met you. Besides, of course, there is the question of your name.

ALGY. (*With head on her shoulder*) Yes, of course. (*Nervously.*)

CECILY. You must not laugh at me, darling, but it had always been a girlish dream of mine to love someone whose name was Ernest. (*Both rise and move R.C.*) There is something in that name that seems to inspire absolute confidence. I pity any poor married woman whose husband is not called Ernest.

ALGY. But, my dear child, do you mean to say you could not love me if I had some other name?

CECILY. But what name?

ALGY. Oh, any name you like—Algernon, for instance——

CECILY. But I don't like the name of Algernon. (*Crossing c. ALGY follows.*)

ALGY. Well, my own dear, sweet, loving little darling, I really can't see why you should object to the name of Algernon. It is not at all a bad name. In fact, it is rather an aristocratic name. But seri-

ously, Cecily, if my name *was* Algy, couldn't you love me?

CECILY. I might respect you, Ernest. I might admire your character, but I fear I would not be able to give you my undivided attention.

ALGY. Ahem! Cecily! (*Picking up hat*) Your rector here is, I suppose, thoroughly experienced in the practice of all the rights and ceremonials of the church?

CECILY. Oh, yes. Doctor Chasuble is a most learned man. He has never written a single book, so you can imagine how much he knows.

ALGY. I must see him at once on a matter of important christening—I mean business. (*Crossing L.*) I'll be back in no time. (*Kisses her. Exit L.*)

CECILY. What an impetuous boy he is! (*Moves up to chair*) I like his hair so much. I must enter his proposal in my diary. (*Goes over and sits down R. of c. table.*)

MERRIMAN. (*Enters R.*) A Miss Fairfax has just called to see Mr. Worthing. On very important business, Miss Fairfax states.

CECILY. Isn't Mr. Worthing in his library?

MERRIMAN. Mr. Worthing went over in the direction of the Rectory some time ago.

CECILY. Pray ask the lady to come out here. Mr. Worthing is sure to be back soon. And you can bring tea.

MERRIMAN. Yes, Miss. (*Exit R.*)

CECILY. Miss Fairfax! I suppose one of the many elderly good women who are associated with Uncle Jack in some of his philanthropic work in London. I don't quite like women who are interested in philanthropic work. I think it is so forward of them. (*Rising; moving L.C.*)

MERRIMAN. (*Enters R.*) Miss Fairfax. (*Enter GWENDOLINE R. Exit MERRIMAN R.*)

CECILY. (*Advancing to meet her, c.*) Pray let

me introduce myself to you. My name is Cecily Cardew.

GWENDOLINE. (c.) Cecily Cardew! (*Moving to her and shaking hands*) What a very sweet name. Something tells me that we are going to be *great friends*. I like you already more than I can say. My first impressions of people are never wrong.

CECILY. How nice of you to like me so much after we have known each other such a comparatively short time. (*Pause*) Pray sit down.

GWENDOLINE. (*Still standing up front of c. chair*) I may call you Cecily, may I not?

CECILY. With pleasure.

GWENDOLINE. And you will always call *me* Gwendoline, won't you?

CECILY. If you wish.

GWENDOLINE. Then that is all settled, is it not?

CECILY. I hope so. (*Pause. They both sit together, CECILY L.C., GWENDOLINE C.*)

GWENDOLINE. Perhaps this might be favorable for my mentioning who I am. My father is Lord Bracknell. You have never *heard* of papa, I suppose?

CECILY. I don't think so.

GWENDOLINE. *Outside* the family circle, papa, I am glad to say, is entirely unknown. I think that is quite as it should be. The home seems to me to be the proper sphere for the man. Cecily, mamma, whose views on education are remarkably strict, has brought me up to be extremely short-sighted. It's part of her system, so you do not mind my looking at you through my glasses?

CECILY. Oh, not at all, Gwendoline. I am very fond of being looked at.

GWENDOLINE. (*Long pause. After examining CECILY carefully through lorgnette*) You are here on a short visit, I suppose?

CECILY. Oh, no! I live here.

GWENDOLINE. (*Severely*) Really? Your *mother*, no doubt, or some female relative of advanced years, resides here also.

CECILY. Oh, no! I have no mother, nor, in fact, any relations.

GWENDOLINE. Indeed?

CECILY. My dear guardian, with the assistance of Miss Prism, has the *arduous* task of looking after me.

GWENDOLINE. Your guardian?

CECILY. Yes, I am Mr. Worthing's ward.

GWENDOLINE. Oh! It is strange he never mentioned to me that he had a ward. How secretive of him. He grows more interesting hourly. I am not sure, however, that the news inspires me with feelings of unmixed delight. (*Rises and walks R.C.*) I am very fond of you, Cecily. I have liked you ever since I met you. But I am bound to state that, now I know that you are Mr. Worthing's ward, I cannot help expressing the wish that you were—well, just a little older than you seem to be—and not quite so very alluring in appearance. In fact, if I may speak candidly— (*Returning C.*)

CECILY. Pray do! I think that whenever one has anything unpleasant to say, one should always be quite candid.

GWENDOLINE. Well, to speak with perfect candor, Cecily, I wish that you were fully thirty-five—(*Sits on sofa, R. of CECILY*)—and more than usually plain for your age. Ernest has a strong, upright nature. He is the very soul of truth and honor. But even men of the noblest possible moral character are extremely susceptible to the influence of the physical charms of others.

CECILY. I beg your pardon, Gwendoline. Did you say Ernest?

GWENDOLINE. Yes.

CECILY. Oh, but it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing

who is my guardian. It is his brother—his elder brother.

GWENDOLINE. Ernest never mentioned to me that he had a brother.

CECILY. I am sorry to say they have not been on good terms for a long time.

GWENDOLINE. Ah, that accounts for it. And now I think of it, I have never heard any man mention his brother. The subject seems distasteful to most men. Of course you are quite, quite sure that it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is your guardian?

CECILY. Quite sure. (*Pause*) In fact, I am going to be *his*.

GWENDOLINE. (*Inquiringly*) I beg your pardon?

CECILY. (*Rather shy and confidently*) Dearest Gwendoline, there is no reason why I should make any secret of it to you. Our little county newspaper is sure to chronicle the fact next week. Mr. Ernest Worthing and I are engaged to be married.

GWENDOLINE. (*Quite politely, rising, crossing R.C.*) My darling Cecily, I think there must be some *slight* error. Mr. Ernest Worthing is engaged to *me*. The announcement will appear in the *Morning Post* on Saturday at the latest.

CECILY. (*Very politely, rising, and moving R.C.*) I am *afraid* you must be under some misconception. Ernest proposed to me exactly ten minutes ago. (*Shows diary.*)

GWENDOLINE. (*Examines diary through her lorgnette carefully*) It is certainly very curious, for he asked *me* to be his *wife* yesterday afternoon at five-thirty. If you would care to verify the incident, pray do so. I never travel without my diary. (*Produces her diary*) I am so sorry, dear Cecily, if it is any disappointment to you, but I am afraid I have the prior claim.

CECILY. It would distress me more than I can tell you, dear Gwendoline, if it caused you any mental

or physical anguish, but I feel bound to point out that since Ernest proposed to *you* he has clearly changed his mind.

GWENDOLINE. (*Meditatively*) If the poor fellow has been entrapped into any foolish promise, I shall consider it my duty to rescue him *at once*, and with a *firm hand*. (*Moves a little R.C.*)

CECILY. (*Thoughtfully and sadly, moving slowly L.*) Whatever unfortunate entanglement my dear boy may have got into, *I* will never reproach him with it, *after* we are married. (*Moves down c.*)

GWENDOLINE. (*Moving c.*) Do you allude to *me*, Miss Cardew, as an entanglement? You are presumptuous. On an occasion of this kind, it becomes more than a moral duty to speak one's mind—it becomes a pleasure.

CECILY. (*Moving up c. to GWENDOLINE*) Do you suggest, Miss Fairfax, that I entrapped Ernest into an engagement? How dare you? This is no time for wearing the shallow mask of manners. When I see a *spade* I call it a *spade*.

(*Enter MERRIMAN. He carries a salver, tablecloth and plate stand. GWENDOLINE is about to make a retort. The presence of a servant exercises a restraining influence under which both girls chafe.*)

GWENDOLINE. (*Satirically*) I am glad to say that I have never seen a spade. It is obvious that our social spheres have been *widely* different.

MERRIMAN. Shall I lay tea here as usual, Miss? (*GWENDOLINE moves up R. and returns, moving L.C.*)

CECILY. (*Sternly, in a clear voice*) Yes, as usual. (*MERRIMAN begins to clear table and lay cloth. Long pause. CECILY and GWENDOLINE glare at each other, then separate and move respectively L. and R.*)

GWENDOLINE. (*Looking round, moving back R., and coming down c.*) Quite a well-kept garden this is, Miss Cardew.

CECILY. So glad you like it, Miss Fairfax. (*Moving L. and then to R.C.*)

GWENDOLINE. I had no idea there were any flowers in the country.

CECILY. Oh, flowers are as common here, Miss Fairfax, as people are in London.

(*SERVANT enters from house, carrying tray set with tea things. He hands it to MERRIMAN, who places it on table and remains waiting. SERVANT exits into house and re-enters with wicker table, on which are plates and cover dishes containing uncut cake, muffins, and tea-cake. SERVANT puts table R. of R.C. chair, then exits into house.*)

GWENDOLINE. Personally I cannot understand how anybody manages to exist in the country, if anybody who is anybody does. The country always bores me to death. (*Sits R.*)

CECILY. Ah! That is what the newspapers call agricultural depression, is it not? I believe the aristocracy are suffering very much from it just at present. It is almost an epidemic amongst them, I have been told. May I offer you some tea, Miss Fairfax? (*Sits c. and begins to pour out tea.*)

GWENDOLINE. (*With elaborate politeness*) Thank you. (*Aside*) Detestable girl! But I require tea!

CECILY. (*Sweetly*) Sugar?

GWENDOLINE. (*Superciliously*) No, thank you. Sugar is not fashionable any more. (*CECILY looks angrily at her, takes up tongs again, and puts four lumps of sugar into the cup which she then places on salver that MERRIMAN is holding.*)

CECILY. (*Severely*) Cake, or bread and butter?

GWENDOLINE. (*In a bored manner*) Bread and

butter, please. (*CECILY is about to put bread and butter on tray.*) Cake is rarely seen at the best houses nowadays.

(*CECILY cuts a large slice of cake, and puts it on MERRIMAN'S tray. MERRIMAN moves to back of tree, picks up plate-stand, goes down L. of GWENDOLINE, places plate-stand beside her, hands tea, and puts cake on stand. Exit MERRIMAN into house. GWENDOLINE drinks the tea and makes a grimace, puts down cup at once, reaches out her hand for bread and butter, looks at it and finds it is cake, rises in indignation and moves C.*)

GWENDOLINE. (*Rises, crossing to table*) You have filled my cup with lumps of sugar, and though I asked most distinctly for bread and butter, you have given me cake. (*Both put down their cups.*) I am known for the gentleness of my disposition, and the extraordinary sweetness of my nature, but I warn you, Miss Cardew, you may go too far.

CECILY. (*Rising*) To save my poor, innocent, trusting boy from the machinations of any other girl, there are no lengths to which I would not go.

GWENDOLINE. From the moment I saw you I distrusted you. I felt that you were false and deceitful. I am never deceived in such matters. My first impressions of people are invariably right. (*Stamping foot.*)

CECILY. It seems to me, Miss Fairfax, that I am trespassing on your valuable time. No doubt you have many other calls of a similar character to make in the neighborhood. (*GWENDOLINE goes away R. Enter JACK from R.*)

GWENDOLINE. Ernest! My own Ernest!

JACK. (*Advancing to R.C.*) Gwendoline, darling! (*Offers to kiss her.*)

GWENDOLINE. (*Drawing back*) A moment! May I ask if you are engaged to be married to this young lady? (*Points to CECILY.*)

JACK. (*Laughing*) To dear little Cecily! Of course not! What could have put such an idea into your pretty little head?

GWENDOLINE. Thank you. You may! (*Offers her cheek.*)

CECILY. (*Very sweetly*) I knew there must be some misunderstanding, Miss Fairfax. The gentleman whose arm is at present round your waist is my dear guardian, Mr. John Worthing.

GWENDOLINE. I beg your pardon. (*Moves back R.C.*)

CECILY. This is my Uncle Jack.

GWENDOLINE. (*Receding*) Jack! Oh! (*Enter ALGY from L.*)

CECILY. Here is Ernest!

ALGY. (*Goes straight over to L. of CECILY without noticing anyone else*) My own love! (*Offers to kiss her.*)

CECILY. (*Drawing back*) A moment! Ernest, may I ask if you are engaged to be married to this young lady?

ALGY. (*Looking round*) To what young lady? Gwendoline! (*Laughing*) Of course not! What could have put such an idea into your pretty little head?

CECILY. Thank you! (*Presenting her cheek to be kissed*) You may. (*ALGY kisses her.*)

GWENDOLINE. (*Crosses c.*) I felt there was some slight error, Miss Cardew. The gentleman who is now embracing you is my cousin, Mr. Algernon Moncrieff.

CECILY. (*Breaking away from ALGY*) Algernon Moncrieff? Oh! (*To ALGY*) Are you called Algernon?

ALGY. I cannot deny it!

CECILY. Oh! (*Crosses to GWENDOLINE. The TWO GIRLS move c. toward each other and put their arms round each other's waists as if for protection.*)

GWENDOLINE. Is your name really John?

JACK. (*Standing rather proudly*) I could deny it if I liked—I could deny anything if I liked. But my name certainly is John. It has been John for years.

CECILY. (*To GWENDOLINE*) A gross deception has been practiced on both of us.

GWENDOLINE. My poor wounded Cecily!

CECILY. My sweet wronged Gwendoline!

GWENDOLINE. (*Slowly and seriously*) You will call me sister, will you not? (*They embrace. JACK and ALGY groan and walk up and down R. and L.*)

CECILY. (*Rather brightly*) There is just one question I would like to be allowed to ask my guardian. (*ALGY comes down L. JACK comes down R.*)

GWENDOLINE. An admirable idea! Mr. Worthing, there is just one question I would like to be permitted to put to you. Where is your brother Ernest? We are both engaged to be married to your brother Ernest, so it is a matter of some importance to us to know where your brother Ernest is at present.

JACK. (*Slowly and hesitatingly*) Gwendoline—Cecily. (*Crossing c.*) It is very painful for me to be forced to speak the truth. (*ALGY sinks on L.C. sofa.*) It is the first time in my life that I have ever been reduced to such a painful position, and I am really quite inexperienced in doing anything of the kind. However, I will tell you quite frankly that I *have* no brother Ernest. I have no brother at all. I never had a brother in my life. And I certainly have not the smallest intention of ever having one in the future. (*ALGY, who has been seated down L., turns in chair.*)

CECILY. (*Surprised*) No brother at all?

JACK. (*Cheerily*) None!

GWENDOLINE. (*Severely approaching him*) Have you never had a brother of any kind?

JACK. (*Pleasantly*) Never. Not even of any kind. (*Crossing L. to ALGY and sitting R. of sofa R.C.*)

GWENDOLINE. I am afraid it is quite clear, Cecily, that neither of us is engaged to be married to anyone. (*Crossing to CECILY C.*)

CECILY. It is not a very pleasant position for a young girl to suddenly find herself in, is it?

GWENDOLINE. Let us go into the house. (*Taking CECILY away up R.*) They will hardly venture to come after us there.

CECILY. No, men are so cowardly, aren't they? (*Exeunt into house with scornful look R. ALGY kicks JACK, and JACK returns it spitefully.*)

JACK. This ghastly state of things is what you call Bunburying, I suppose.

ALGY. Yes, and a perfectly wonderful Bunbury it is. The most wonderful Bunbury I have ever had in my life.

JACK. Well, you've no right whatsoever to Bunbury here.

ALGY. That is absurd. One has a right to Bunbury anywhere one chooses. Every serious Bunburyist knows that.

JACK. Serious Bunburyists! Good heavens! (*Rises, crosses to C. and moves up C.*)

ALGY. (*Rising*) Well, one must be serious about something, if one wants to have any amusement in life. I happen to be serious about Bunburying. What on earth you are serious about I haven't got the remotest idea. About everything, I should fancy. You have such an absolutely trivial nature.

JACK. (*Coming C.*) Well, the only small satisfaction I have in the whole of this wretched business is that your friend Bunbury is quite exploded. You won't be able to run down to the country quite so

often as you used to do, Algy. And a very good thing, too. (JACK *moves R.*)

ALGY. Your brother is a little off color, isn't he, dear Jack? You won't be able to disappear to London quite so frequently as your wicked custom was. And not a bad thing either.

JACK. (*Coming C.*) As for your conduct toward Miss Cardew, I must say that your taking in a sweet, simple, innocent girl like that is quite inexcusable. To say nothing of the fact that she is *my* ward.

ALGY. I can see no possible defense at all for your deceiving a brilliant, clever, thoroughly experienced young lady like Miss Fairfax. To say nothing of the fact that she is *my* cousin. (*Sits R. end of settee.*)

JACK. I wanted to be engaged to Gwendoline, that is all. I love her.

ALGY. Well, I simply wanted to be engaged to Cecily. I adore her.

JACK. There is certainly no chance of your marrying Miss Cardew. (*Sits C.*)

ALGY. I don't think there is much likelihood, Jack, of you and Miss Fairfax being united. (*Takes muffins and sits L.C.*)

JACK. How can you sit there, calmly eating muffins, when we are in this horrible trouble, I can't make out. You seem to me to be perfectly heartless.

ALGY. Well, I can't eat muffins in an agitated manner. The butter would probably get on one's cuffs. One should always eat muffins quite calmly. It is the only way to eat them.

JACK. I say it is perfectly heartless your eating muffins at all under the circumstances.

ALGY. (JACK *sits C. after pouring tea*) When I am in trouble, eating is the only thing that consoles me. Indeed, when I am really in great trouble, as anyone who knows me intimately will tell you, I refuse everything except food and drink. At the present moment I am eating muffins because I am

unhappy. Besides, I am particularly fond of muffins. (*Picks muffin dish up.*)

JACK. (*Rising*) Well, that is no reason why you should eat them all in that greedy way. (*Takes muffin from ALGY.*)

ALGY. (*Picks up tea-cake dish, offering tea-cake, rising*) I wish you would take tea-cake instead. I don't like tea-cake.

JACK. Good heavens! I suppose a man may eat his own muffins in his own garden.

ALGY. But you have just said it was perfectly heartless to eat muffins.

JACK. I said it was perfectly heartless of you under the circumstances. That is a very different thing.

ALGY. That may be. But the muffins are the same. (*They change plates. ALGY goes to head of table.*)

JACK. Algy, I wish to goodness you would go. (*Puts tea-cake on table.*)

ALGY. I cannot. (*Sits on settee L.C.*) I have just made arrangements with Dr. Chasuble to be christened at a quarter to six, under the name of Ernest. (*Sits L.C. on sofa.*)

JACK. (*Sits R. of table*) My dear fellow, the sooner you give up that nonsense the better. (*Pouring out tea*) I made arrangements this morning with Doctor Chasuble to be christened myself at five-thirty, and I naturally will take the name of Ernest. Gwendoline would wish it. We can't both be christened Ernest. It would be absurd. Besides, I have a perfect right to be christened if I like. There is no evidence at all that I ever have been christened by anybody. I should think it extremely probable I never was so, and so does Doctor Chasuble. It is entirely different in your case. You have been christened already. (*Crossing R.C.*)

ALGY. Yes, but I have not been christened for years.

JACK. Yes, but you *have* been christened. That is the important thing.

ALGY. Quite so. (*Rises and moves to him*) So I know my constitution can stand it. If you are not quite sure about your ever having been christened, I must say I think it rather dangerous your venturing on it now. It might make you unwell. (*Business simultaneously*) You can hardly have forgotten that someone very closely connected with you was very nearly carried off this week in Paris, by a severe chill. (*JACK eats muffins again.*) Jack, you are at the muffins again. I wish you wouldn't. (*Takes them*) I told you I was particularly fond of muffins.

JACK. Algy, I have already told you to go. I don't want you here. Why don't you go?

ALGY. (*Sits R.C.*) I haven't quite finished my tea yet.

(*Ring curtain down. ALGY sits back of table and takes JACK'S cup of tea and begins to drink it.*)

JACK. You are drinking my tea.

ALGY. It's not your tea. You are eating my muffins——

JACK. They are not your muffins——

(*Curtain down by this. JACK groans and sinks on to settee.*)

QUICK ACT DROP

For Call:

GWENDOLINE, CECILY, JACK, ALGY, MISS PRISM,
DR. CHASUBLE.

ACT THREE

SCENE: *Morning-room at the Manor House. Double doors up R.C., window L., fireplace R., chair R. of table out toward C.*

GWENDOLINE and CECILY discovered at window L.

GWENDOLINE. The fact that they did not at once follow us into the house, as anyone else would have done, seems to me to show that they have some sense of shame left.

CECILY. They have been eating muffins. That looks like repentance.

GWENDOLINE. They're looking at us—what effrontery!

CECILY. They're approaching; that's very forward of them. (JACK *passes window, followed by* ALGY.)

GWENDOLINE. Let us preserve a dignified silence.

CECILY. Certainly. It's the only thing to do now. (*Both move down L. Enter JACK, R. of ALGY. They whistle.*)

GWENDOLINE. This dignified silence seems to produce an unpleasant effect. (ALGY *moves down L. JACK moves down R.C.*)

CECILY. Most distasteful!

GWENDOLINE. But we will not be the first to speak.

CECILY. Certainly not.

GWENDOLINE. (*Crossing c.*) Mr. Worthing, I have something very particular to ask you. Much depends on your reply.

CECILY. (*Moving to ALGY c.*) Mr. Moncrieff,

kindly answer me the following question: Why did you pretend to be my guardian's brother?

ALGY. In order that I might have an opportunity of meeting you.

CECILY. (*Crossing c. to GWENDOLINE. ALGY moves down L.*) That certainly seems a satisfactory explanation, does it not? (JACK R.)

GWENDOLINE. (*Crossing to JACK, who comes down c.*) Mr. Worthing, what explanation can you offer to me for pretending to have a brother? Was it in order that you might have an opportunity of coming up to town to see me as often as possible?

JACK. Certain'y, Miss Fairfax.

(JACK and ALGY both move together like Siamese twins in every movement until both say "Christened this afternoon." First to front of sofa, then fold hands together, then raise eyes to ceiling, then sit on sofa, unfold hands, lean back, tilting up legs with both feet off ground, then twitch trousers above knee, à la dude, so as not to crease them; then both feet on ground, fold hands together on knees and look perfectly unconcerned.)

GWENDOLINE. (*Moving to CECILY*) Their explanations appear to be quite satisfactory.

GWENDOLINE. You think we should forgive them?

CECILY and GWENDOLINE. (*Together*) Yes. No, I mean, no.

GWENDOLINE. True! I had forgotten. There are principles at stake that one cannot surrender. Which of us should tell them? The task is not a pleasant one.

CECILY. Could we not both speak at the same time?

GWENDOLINE. An excellent idea! Will you take the time from me?

CECILY. Certainly. (*Business of beating time.*)

GWENDOLINE and CECILY. (*Speaking together and facing their respective sweethearts*) Your Christian names are still an insuperable barrier. That is all.

JACK. (*To ALGY*) Will you take the time from me?

JACK and ALGY. (*Speaking together*) Our Christian names! Is that all? But we are going to be christened this afternoon.

GWENDOLINE. (*Crosses to JACK R.*) For my sake you are prepared to do this terrible thing?

JACK. I am!

CECILY. (*To ALGY L.C.*) To please me you are ready to face this fearful ordeal?

ALGY. I am!

GWENDOLINE. (*R.C. to CECILY*) How absurd to talk of the equality of the sexes. Where questions of self-sacrifice are concerned, men are infinitely beyond us.

JACK. We are!

CECILY. (*To GWENDOLINE*) They have moments of physical courage of which we women know absolutely nothing.

GWENDOLINE. (*To JACK*) Darling! (*They embrace R.C.*)

ALGY. (*To CECILY*) Darling! (*They embrace L.C.*)

(*They fall into each other's arms. Enter MERRIMAN R.C., coughs loudly on entering, seeing the situation.*)

MERRIMAN. Ahem! ahem! Lady Bracknell!

JACK. Good heavens!

(*Enter LADY BRACKNELL. The couples separate. JACK and GWENDOLINE move down R. Exit MERRIMAN.*)

LADY BRACKNELL. Gwendoline! What does this mean?

GWENDOLINE. Merely that I am engaged to be married to Mr. Worthing, Mamma.

LADY BRACKNELL. Sit down! (*Points to her to sit on sofa R.C.; turns to JACK*) Apprised, sir, of my daughter's sudden flight by her trusty maid, whose confidence I purchased by means of a small coin, I followed her at once by a luggage train. Of course, Mr. Worthing, you will clearly understand that all communication between yourself and my daughter must cease immediately from this moment. On this point as, indeed, on all points, I am firm.

JACK. I am engaged to be married to Gwendoline, Lady Bracknell. (*Sits beside GWENDOLINE.*)

LADY BRACKNELL. You are nothing of the kind, sir. (*Turns and sits. To ALGY*) And now as regards Algernon—Algernon!

ALGY. Yes, Aunt Augusta. (*Crosses L.C. JACK moves and sits R.C.*)

LADY BRACKNELL. May I ask if it is in this house that your invalid friend, Mr. Bunbury, resides?

ALGY. Oh, no! Bunbury doesn't live here. Bunbury is somewhere else at present. In fact Bunbury is dead!

LADY BRACKNELL. Dead? When did Mr. Bunbury die? His death must have been extremely sudden.

ALGY. Bunbury has exploded—I mean—— Oh, I killed Bunbury this afternoon. (*Look from LADY BRACKNELL.*) I mean poor Bunbury died this afternoon. I should say the doctors found out that Bunbury could not live—so Bunbury died. (*ALGY holds CECILY'S hand. JACK and GWENDOLINE R.*)

LADY BRACKNELL. Really, he seems to have had great confidence in the opinion of his physicians. I am glad, however, that he made up his mind at the last to some definite course of action, and acted un-

der proper medical advice. And now that we have buried Mr. Bunbury at last, may I ask, Mr. Worthing, who is that young lady whose hand my nephew Algernon is now holding in what seems to me a peculiarly unnecessary manner?

JACK. (*Rising*) That, Lady Bracknell, is Miss Cecily Cardew, my ward. (LADY BRACKNELL *bows coldly to CECILY.*)

ALGY. I am engaged to be married to Cecily, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL. I beg your pardon!

CECILY. Mr. Moncrieff and I are engaged to be married, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL. (*With a shiver*) I do not know whether there is anything peculiarly exciting in the air of this part of Hertfordshire, but the amount of engagements that go on seems to me considerably above the proper average that statistics have laid down for our guidance. I think some preliminary inquiry on my part would not be out of place. Mr. Worthing, who is Miss Cardew?

JACK. (*Looks perfectly furious but restrains himself. In a clear, cold voice*) Miss Cardew is the granddaughter of the late Mr. Thomas Cardew, of 149, Belgrave Square, S.W.; Gervase Park, Dorking, Surrey; and the Glen, Fifeshire, N. B.

LADY BRACKNELL. That sounds not unsatisfactory. Three addresses always inspire confidence, even in tradesmen. So far I am satisfied.

JACK. (*C., very irritably*) I have also in my possession, you will be pleased to hear, certificates of Miss Cardew's birth, registration, baptism, whooping cough, vaccination, confirmation, and the measles, both the German and the English variety.

LADY BRACKNELL. (*Calmly*) Ah! A life crowded with incident, I see. Though perhaps somewhat too exciting for a young girl. I am not myself in favor of premature experiences. (*Rises; looks at her*

watch) Gwendoline, the time approaches for our departure. We have not a minute to lose. (*Rises and moves R.C.*) As a matter of form, Mr. Worthing, I had better ask you if Miss Cardew has any little fortune. (*GWENDOLINE rises.*)

JACK. Oh, about a hundred and thirty thousand pounds in the funds. That is all. (*LADY BRACKNELL sits R.C.*) Good-bye, Lady Bracknell. So pleased to have seen you.

LADY BRACKNELL. A moment, Mr. Worthing. A hundred and thirty thousand pounds! And in the funds! Miss Cardew seems to be a most attractive young lady, now that I look at her. (*To CECILY*) Come here, dear. (*CECILY goes across. JACK moves to back of sofa.*) Sweet child, your dress is sadly simple, and your hair seems almost as nature might have left it. But we can soon alter all that. A thoroughly experienced French maid produces a marvellous result in a very brief space of time. I remember recommending one to young Lady Lancing, and after three months her own husband did not know her.

JACK. (*R.C.*) And after six months nobody knew her.

LADY BRACKNELL. Kindly turn round, sweet child. (*CECILY turns completely round.*) Algernon!

ALGY. Yes, Aunt Augusta! (*Moving R.C. to CECILY.*)

LADY BRACKNELL. There are distinct social possibilities in Miss Cardew. (*JACK moves over to back of sofa.*)

ALGY. (*Kissing CECILY*) Cecily is the sweetest, dearest, prettiest girl in the whole world. And I don't care twopence about social possibilities.

LADY BRACKNELL. Never speak disrespectfully of society, Algernon. Only people who can't get into it do that. (*To CECILY*) Dear child, of course you know that Algernon has nothing but his debts to de-

pend upon. But I do not approve of mercenary marriages. When I married Lord Bracknell I had no fortune of any kind. But I never dreamed for a moment of letting that stand in my way. Well, I suppose I must give my consent.

ALGY. Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL. Cecily, you may kiss me.

CECILY. (*Crosses to her; kisses her*) Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL. The marriage, I think, had better take place quite soon.

ALGY and CECILY. Thank you, Aunt Augusta. (*Moving L.C.*)

LADY BRACKNELL. To speak frankly, I am not in favor of long engagements; they give people the opportunity of finding out each other's characters before marriage, which I think is never advisable.

JACK. (*Moves from back of sofa R. to R.C.*) I beg your pardon for interrupting you, Lady Bracknell, but this engagement is quite out of the question. I am Miss Cardew's guardian. She cannot marry without my consent until she comes of age. That consent I absolutely decline to give.

LADY BRACKNELL. Upon what grounds, may I ask?

JACK. It pains me very much to have to speak frankly to you, Lady Bracknell, about your nephew, but I suspect him of being untruthful. (*ALGY and CECILY look at him in amazement.*)

LADY BRACKNELL. Untruthful! My nephew Algernon! Impossible! He's an Oxonian.

JACK. (*R.C.*) I fear there can be no possible doubt about the matter. This afternoon, during my temporary absence in London, on an important question of romance, he obtained admission into my house by means of a false pretense of being my brother. Under an assumed name he succeeded in the course of the afternoon in alienating the affections of my only

ward. He subsequently stayed to tea and devoured every single muffin. And what makes his conduct all the more heartless is that he was perfectly well aware from the first that I have no brother and that I never had a brother, not even of any kind. I distinctly told him so myself yesterday afternoon.

LADY BRACKNELL. Ahem! Mr. Worthing, after careful consideration, I have decided to entirely overlook my nephew's conduct to you. (*To CECILY*) Come here, sweet child. (*CECILY goes over.*) How old are you, dear?

CECILY. Well, I am really only eighteen, but I always admit to twenty when I go to evening parties.

LADY BRACKNELL. (*In a meditative manner*) Well, it will not be very long before you are of age and free from the restraints of tutelage. So I don't think your guardian's consent, after all, a matter of any importance.

JACK. (*R.C., coming down c.*) Pray excuse me, Lady Bracknell, for interrupting you again, but it is only fair to tell you that, according to the terms of her grandfather's will, Miss Cardew does not come legally of age till she is thirty-five.

LADY BRACKNELL. That does not seem to me to be a grave objection. Thirty-five is a very attractive age. London society is full of women of the very highest birth who have, of their own free choice, remained thirty-five for years.

CECILY. (*Crossing L. to ALGY*) Algy, could you wait for me till I was thirty-five?

ALGY. Of course I could, Cecily. You know I could.

CECILY. Yes, I felt it instinctively, but I couldn't wait all that time.

ALGY. Then what is to be done, Cecily?

CECILY. I don't know, Mr. Moncrieff. (*CECILY moves up L. behind table. ALGY moves to JACK L.C.*)

LADY BRACKNELL. My dear Mr. Worthing, as

Miss Cardew states positively that she cannot wait till she is thirty-five—a remark which I am bound to say seems to me to show a somewhat impatient nature, I would beg of you to reconsider your decision.

JACK. (R.C.) But my dear Lady Bracknell, the matter is entirely in your own hands. The moment you consent to my marriage with Gwendoline, I will most gladly allow your nephew to form an alliance with my ward.

LADY BRACKNELL. (*Rising and drawing herself up*) Mr. Worthing, you must be quite aware that which you propose is out of the question. (JACK and ALGY walk up c. and down c. again.)

JACK. Then a passionate celibacy is all that any of us can look forward to. (*Moves over to back of L.C. chair to CECILY. ALGY and CECILY move up L.C.*)

LADY BRACKNELL. That is not the destiny I propose for Gwendoline. Algernon, of course, can choose for himself. (*Pulls out her watch*) Come, dear. (GWENDOLINE rises.) We must be going.

CHASUBLE. (*Enters R.C.*) Is everything quite ready for the christenings?

LADY BRACKNELL. (R.C.) Christenings, sir? Is not that somewhat premature?

CHASUBLE. (*Looking rather puzzled and pointing to JACK and ALGY*) Both these gentlemen have expressed a desire for immediate christening. (*Both bow.*)

LADY BRACKNELL. At their age? The idea is grotesque and irreligious! (*To ALGY*) Algernon, I forbid you to be christened. I will not hear of such excesses. Lord Bracknell would be highly displeased if he learned that that was the way in which you wasted your time and money.

CHASUBLE. Am I to understand, then, that there are to be no christenings at all this afternoon?

JACK. I don't think that, as things now stand, it

would be of any practical value to either of us, Doctor Chasuble.

CHASUBLE. I am grieved to hear such sentiments from you, Mr. Worthing. I must return to the church at once. Indeed, I have just been informed by the pew-opener that for the last hour and a half Miss Prism has been waiting for me in the vestry.

LADY BRACKNELL. (*Starting*) Miss Prism! Did I hear you mention a Miss Prism? (JACK *crosses* R. to GWENDOLINE. ALGY *crosses* L.C. to CECILY.)

CHARLES. Yes, Lady Bracknell, I am on my way to join her.

LADY BRACKNELL. (*Anxiously*) Pray allow me to detain you for a moment. This matter may prove to be one of vital importance to Lord Bracknell and myself. Is this Miss Prism a female of repellant aspect, remotely connected with education?

CHASUBLE. (*Somewhat indignantly*) She is the most cultivated of ladies, and the very picture of respectability.

LADY BRACKNELL. (*Thoughtfully*) It is obviously the same person. May I ask what position she holds in your household?

CHASUBLE. (*Severely*) I am a celibate, madam! (*Moves up L.*)

JACK. (*R., interposing*) Miss Prism has been for the last three years Miss Cardew's esteemed governess and valued companion.

LADY BRACKNELL. I must see this Miss Prism at once. Let her be sent for.

CHASUBLE. (*Looking off*) She approaches—she is nigh.

MISS PRISM. (*Enters R.C. hurriedly*) I was told you expected me in the vestry, dear Canon. I have been waiting for you there for an hour and three quarters. (*Catches sight of LADY BRACKNELL, who has fixed her with a stony stare. MISS PRISM grows*

pale and quails, looks anxiously round as if desirous to escape.)

LADY BRACKNELL. (*In a severe judicial voice*) Prism!

MISS PRISM. (*Bowing her head in shame*) Lady Bracknell!

LADY BRACKNELL. Come here, Miss Prism! (*MISS PRISM approaches c. in humble manner.*) Prism! Where is that baby? (*General consternation. CHASUBLE starts back in horror. ALGY and JACK pretend to be anxious to shield CECILY and GWENDOLINE from hearing a terrible scandal. MISS PRISM makes no answer.*) Thirty-four years ago, Prism, you left Lord Bracknell's house, number 104, Grosvenor Street, in charge of a perambulator that contained a baby of the male sex. You never returned. A few weeks later, through the elaborate investigation of the Metropolitan Police, the perambulator was discovered at midnight, standing by itself in a remote corner of Hyde Park. It contained the manuscript of a three-volume novel of more than usually revolting sentimentality. (*MISS PRISM starts in involuntary indignation.*) But the baby was not there. Prism! Where is that baby? (*Everyone looks at MISS PRISM.*)

MISS PRISM. Lady Brackneli, I admit with shame that I do not know. I only wish I did. The plain facts of the case are these. On the morning of the day you mention, a day that is forever branded on my memory, I prepared as usual to take the baby out in the perambulator. I had also with me a somewhat old but capacious handbag in which I intended to place the manuscript of a work of fiction that I had written during my few unoccupied hours. In a moment of mental abstraction, for which I can never forgive myself, I deposited the manuscript in the bassinette, and placed the baby in the handbag. (*Crossing L.*)

JACK. (*Has been listening attentively; comes c.*)
But where did you deposit the handbag?

MISS PRISM. Do not ask me, Mr. Worthing.

JACK. Miss Prism, this is a matter of no small importance to me. I insist on knowing where you deposited the handbag that contained the infant.

MISS PRISM. In the cloakroom at Victoria Station—the Brighton line. (*Quite crushed, sinks into chair L.C.*)

JACK. I must retire to my room for a moment.
(*Exit JACK R.C.*)

CHASUBLE. (*Crossing c. behind table to sofa*)
What do you think this means, Lady Bracknell?

LADY BRACKNELL. I dare not even suspect, Dr. Chasuble. (*Noise heard overhead as if someone is throwing trunks about. Everyone looks up.*)

CECILY. (*Looking up*) Uncle Jack seems strangely agitated.

CHASUBLE. Your guardian has a very emotional nature.

LADY BRACKNELL. This noise is extremely unpleasant. (*Noises heard overhead.*)

CHASUBLE. (*Looking up*) It has stopped now.
(*Goes up L.*)

LADY BRACKNELL. I wish he would arrive at some conclusion.

GWENDOLINE. This suspense is terrible. I hope it will last.

JACK. (*Enters R.C. with black leather handbag in his hand. L.C., rushing over to MISS PRISM, who is still seated L.C.*) Is this the handbag, Miss Prism? (*Hands it to her*) Examine it carefully before you speak. The happiness of more than one life depends on your answer.

MISS PRISM. It seems to be mine. (*Rises*) Yes, here is the injury it received through the upsetting of a Gower Street omnibus in younger and happier days. (*Opens bag. In a more confidential and more*

joyful voice) And here, on the lock, are my initials. The bag is undoubtedly mine. I am delighted to have it unexpectedly restored to me. It has been a *great* inconvenience being without it all these years.

JACK. (*In a pathetic voice*) Miss Prism, more is restored to you than the handbag. I was the baby you placed in it.

MISS PRISM. (*Amazed*) You?

JACK. (*Embracing her*) Yes—Mother!

MISS PRISM. (*Recoiling in indignant astonishment*) Mr. Worthing, I am unmarried!

JACK. Unmarried! I do not deny that this is a serious blow. But, after all, who has the right to cast a stone against one who has suffered? Cannot repentance wipe out an act of folly? Why should there be one law for men and another for women? Mother, I forgive you! (*Throws bag to DR. CHASUBLE; tries to embrace her again.*)

MISS PRISM. (*After pause; still more indignant*) Mr. Worthing, there is some error. (*Pointing to LADY BRACKNELL*) There is the lady who can tell you who you really are. (*Retires L. and up to DR. CHASUBLE up L.C., and talks to DR. CHASUBLE.*)

JACK. (*After a pause*) Lady Bracknell, I hate to seem inquisitive, but would you kindly inform me who I am?

LADY BRACKNELL. I am afraid that the news I have to give you will not altogether please you. (*Rising and going up c.*) You are the son of my poor sister, Mrs. Moncrieff, and consequently Algernon's elder brother.

JACK. Algy's elder brother! Then I have a brother after all! I knew I had a brother! I always said I had a brother. Cecily, how could you have ever doubted that I had a brother? (*ALGY crosses to him.*) Dr. Chasuble, my unfortunate brother! Gwendoline, my unfortunate brother!

GWENDOLINE. (*To JACK*) My own! But what

own are you? What is your Christian name now that you have become someone else?

JACK. Good heavens! I had quite forgotten that point. Aunt Augusta, a moment. At the time when Miss Prism left me in the handbag, had I been christened already?

LADY BRACKNELL. (*Coming down c., quite calmly*) Every luxury that money could buy, including christening, had been lavished on you by your fond and doting parents.

JACK. Then I *was* christened! *That* is settled. Now, what name was I given? Let me know the worst.

LADY BRACKNELL. (*After a pause*) Being the eldest son, you were naturally christened after your father.

JACK. (*Irritably*) Yes, but what was our father's Christian name?

LADY BRACKNELL. I remember now that the General was called Ernest.

GWENDOLINE. Ernest! I felt from the first that you could have no other name.

JACK. Gwendoline, at last!

CHASUBLE. Letitia, at last!

MISS PRISM. Frederick, at last!

ALGY. Cecily, at last!

GWENDOLINE. My own Ernest.

} (*Together*)

Tableau

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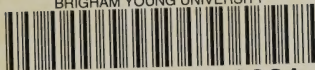
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